



The influence of Roman architecture is seen in the design of the U.S. Capitol.

The Legacy of Rome in the Modern World

37.1 Introduction

In Chapter 36, you learned about one **legacy** of ancient Rome, the Christian religion. In this chapter, you will learn about some other contributions the Romans made to the modern world.

In 1764 C.E., long after the Roman Empire was gone, a young Englishman named Edward Gibbon visited the city of Rome. Gibbon saw the ruins of ancient buildings like the Roman Colosseum. He marveled at Roman statues and the remains of aqueducts and bridges. He wondered, “How did such a great empire come to an end?”

Gibbon decided to write a book on the Roman Empire. More than 20 years later, Gibbon finally laid down his pen. His work filled six books. He called it *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

Why did Gibbon spend so many years learning and writing about ancient Rome? One reason is that Rome has had an enormous influence on western civilization. As one historian said, “Rome perished, yet it lived on.”

In this chapter, you will discover how and why the Roman Empire fell. Then you will learn how Rome’s influence lives on in modern **architecture, art, engineering, language, philosophy,** and **law.**



Use this drawing as a graphic organizer to help you explore Roman influences on modern life.



After years of attacks by invaders, the city of Rome itself was finally captured, marking the official collapse of the western part of the Roman Empire.

contributed to other problems. To finance Rome's huge armies, its citizens had to pay heavy taxes. These taxes hurt the economy and drove many people into poverty. Trade also suffered. Across the empire, the spirit of citizenship declined.

Weakening Frontiers The huge size of the empire made it hard to defend. By the 300s, Germanic tribes were pressing hard on the western borders of the empire. Many of these people settled inside the empire and were recruited into the army. But these soldiers had little loyalty to Rome.

37.2 The End of the Empire in the West

At the height of Rome's power in the 100s C.E., proud Romans believed the empire would last forever. Yet by the year 500, the western half of the empire had collapsed. What happened to cause the fall of the mightiest empire the world had ever known?

Problems in the Late Empire

Most modern historians believe that a number of problems combined to bring about Rome's fall. Here are three of the main reasons.

Political Instability Rome never solved the problem of how to peacefully transfer political power to a new and capable leader. When an emperor died, ambitious rivals often fought each other for the emperor's crown. Real power fell into the hands of the armies, who could help leaders into power—or destroy them. Sometimes rivals didn't wait for an emperor to die; emperors were regularly murdered. After 180 C.E., Rome had a series of weak—and sometimes dishonest—emperors.

Economic and Social Issues Political instability con-

The Fall of Rome

In 330 C.E., the emperor Constantine took a step that changed the future of Rome. He moved his capital 850 miles to the east, to the ancient city of Byzantium. He renamed the city New Rome. Later it was called Constantinople. (Today it is known as Istanbul, Turkey.)

Before Constantine, emperors had tried sharing power over the vast empire between co-rulers. After Constantine's reign, power was usually divided between two emperors, one based in Rome and one in Constantinople. Rome became the capital of just the western part of the empire.

The emperors in Rome soon found themselves threatened by invading Germanic tribes. In 410 C.E., one of these tribes attacked and looted Rome itself. Finally, in 476, the last emperor in the west was driven from his throne. The western half of the empire began to dissolve into separate kingdoms ruled by different tribes.

In the east, the empire continued for another 1,000 years. Today we call this eastern empire the Byzantine Empire, after Byzantium, the original name of its capital city. The Byzantines wove the Roman heritage into their own rich civilization. But they were never able to put the old empire back together. For historians, the fall of Rome marks the end of the ancient world.

Yet the influence of Rome lived on. Let's look now at how Rome's legacy continues to affect our lives today.



37.3 Art

The Romans adopted aspects of other cultures. They modified and blended them into their own culture. This was true of Roman art. The Romans were especially influenced by the art of the Greeks. In fact, historians often speak of **Greco-Roman** art.

The Romans were skilled in creating realistic statues. They imitated Greek sculpture, but they were particularly good at making their sculpted images lifelike.

The homes of wealthy Romans were decorated with colorful murals and mosaics. Again, the Romans took existing art forms and made them their own. They painted beautiful frescoes, a type of mural. Frescoes are painted on moist plaster with water-based paints.

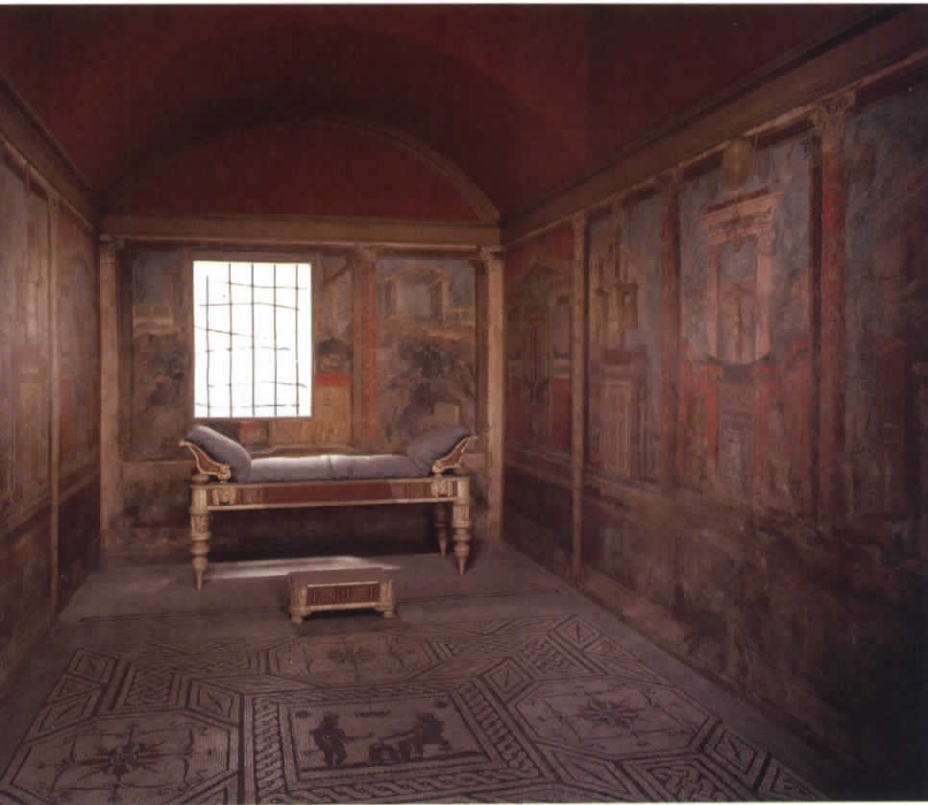
Roman frescoes often showed three-dimensional landscapes and other scenes. Looking at one of these frescoes was almost like looking through the wall at a scene outside. You've probably seen similar murals in restaurants, banks, and other buildings.

Romans were also great patrons (sponsors) of art. They paid thousands of painters, sculptors, and craftspeople to create their works. As a result, the Romans left behind many examples to inspire future generations.

Greco-Roman having the characteristics of Roman art with a strong Greek influence

American artists have often used a Roman style in sculptures and paintings of heroes. Here you see a Roman statue of the emperor Trajan and an American statue of George Washington. In what ways are they alike?





With their frescoes and mosaics, wealthy Roman homes were like art galleries.

A thousand years after the fall of the empire, Roman art was rediscovered during the period called the **Renaissance**. Great artists like Michelangelo revived the Greco-Roman style in their paintings and sculptures.

A good example is the famous ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. The ceiling shows scenes from the Bible painted by Michelangelo in the 1500s. A Roman would feel right at home looking up at this amazing creation.

Roman art has continued to influence painters and sculptors. Roman styles were especially popular during the early days of the United States. Americans imitated these styles to give their art dignity and nobility. You can still see statues in Washington, D.C., that reflect a strong Roman influence.

The Romans also brought a sense of style and luxury to everyday objects. They made highly decorative bottles of blown glass. A bottle for wine might be made in the shape of a cluster of grapes. Romans also developed the arts of gem cutting and metalworking. One popular art form was the cameo. A cameo is a gem that is carved to show a portrait of a person's head or a scene. The Romans wore cameos as jewelry and used them to decorate vases and other objects. You can find examples of all these art forms today.

Renaissance a period of European history around the 14th century in which there was a rebirth of interest and accomplishments in art, literature, and learning

37.4 Architecture and Engineering

The Romans' greatest contributions to science and technology came in the practical fields of architecture and engineering. Roman builders learned from the Greeks, Etruscans, and others. Then they added their own genius to take feats of construction to new heights.

vault an arched structure used to hold up a ceiling or roof

dome a half-round or hemisphere-shaped roof

Architecture

The Romans learned how to use the arch, the vault, and the dome to build huge structures. A **vault** is an arch used to support a ceiling or roof. A **dome** is a vault in the shape of a hemisphere that rests on a circular wall.

The Romans were the first to make widespread use of concrete. They made concrete by mixing broken stone with sand, cement, and water and then allowing the mixture to harden. With concrete, they were able to build much bigger arches than anyone had attempted before. Roman baths and other public buildings often had great arched vaults. The Pantheon, a magnificent temple that still stands in Rome, is famous for its huge dome.

The Romans also invented a new kind of building, the stadium. These were large, open-air structures. The Romans used concrete to build tunnels into the famous Colosseum in Rome. The tunnels made it easy for spectators to reach their seats. Modern football stadiums still use this feature.

The roof of the famous Pantheon in Rome is a huge dome.



The grand style of Roman buildings has inspired many architects through the centuries. One Roman innovation that was widely copied was the triumphal arch. This was a huge monument built to celebrate great victories or achievements. A famous modern example is the Arc de Triomphe (Arch of Triumph) in Paris, France. This monument celebrates the victories of the French emperor Napoleon in the early 1800s. Today it is the national war memorial of France.

You can see a Roman influence in the design of many modern churches, banks, and government buildings. A fine example is the Capitol building, the home of the U.S. Congress in Washington, D.C.

Engineering

The Romans changed engineering as well as architecture. They were the greatest builders of roads, bridges, and aqueducts in the ancient world.

Nearly 53,000 miles of road connected Rome with the frontiers of the empire. The Romans built their roads with layers of stone, sand, and gravel. Their techniques set the standard of road building for 2,000 years. Cars in some parts of Europe still drive on freeways built over old Roman roads.

The Romans also set a new standard for building aqueducts. They did not invent the aqueduct, but once again the Romans learned the technique and expanded on it. They created a system of aqueducts for Rome. The aqueducts brought water from about 60 miles away to the homes of the wealthiest citizens, as well as to the city's public baths and fountains. The Romans built aqueducts in other parts of the empire as well. The water system in Segovia, Spain, still uses part of an ancient Roman aqueduct. Roman arches from aqueducts can still be found in Europe, North Africa, and Asia Minor.



The Roman Colosseum has inspired stadium builders throughout history.

What features of Roman style can you spot in the U.S. Capitol building?



Romans wrote in all capital letters. This Latin inscription on the Arch of Constantine dedicates the arch to Constantine by the Senate and the people of Rome.



37.5 Language

One legacy of Rome that affects us every day is the Roman language, Latin. We still use the Latin alphabet (although Roman Latin used 23 letters and English uses 26). Many of our words

come from Latin. Even Latin proverbs are still in use. For example, look at the reverse side of a U.S. dime. You'll see the United States motto *E pluribus unum* ("Out of many, one").

Several modern European languages developed from Latin, including Italian, Spanish, and French. English is a Germanic language, but it was strongly influenced by the French-speaking Normans, who conquered England in 1066 C.E. English has borrowed heavily from Latin, both directly and by way of French.

You can see the influence of Latin on many of the words we use today. For example, recall that our calendar comes from the one adopted by Julius Caesar. The names of several months come from Latin. *August* honors Caesar Augustus. *September* comes from Latin words meaning "the seventh month." (The Roman year started in March.) *October* means "the eighth

Latin Prefixes Used in English Words

Latin Prefix	Meaning	English Words
in, im, il	not	inactive, impossible, illogical
inter	among, between	international
com, co	together, with	communicate, cooperate
pre	before	precede
post	after, behind	postpone
re	back, again	remember
semi	half	semicircle
sub	under, less than, inferior to	submarine
trans	across, through	transportation

month” in Latin. Can you guess the meanings of *November* and *December*?

Many English words start with Latin prefixes. A prefix is a set of letters at the beginning of a word that carries its own meaning. Attaching a prefix to a root word creates a new word with a new meaning. In fact, the word *prefix* is formed this way. It comes from *pre* (“in front of”) and *fix* (“fasten” or “attach”). The table on the opposite page shows other examples.

As you can see from the table at the right, other English words come from Latin root words. For instance, *manual* is derived from *manus*, the Latin word for “hand.”

Finally, we still often use Roman numerals. The Romans used a system of letters to write numbers. Look at the second table on this page. You may have seen Roman numerals used on clocks, sundials, and the first pages of books, like this one. You might also spot Roman numerals on buildings and in some movie credits to show the year in which they were made.

The Romans combined the seven letters shown in the table to express larger numbers. Putting letters *after* another adds the value of the additional letters. For example, VIII = 5 + 3 = 8 and XX = 10 + 10 = 20. Putting a letter *before* a letter with a greater value subtracts its value. For example, IV = 5 – 1 = 4 and IX = 10 – 1 = 9.

Latin Roots Used in English Words		
Latin Root	Meaning	English Words
anima	life, breath, soul	animal
civis	citizen, community	civic
lex, legalis	law, legal	legislature
manus	hand	manual
militare	to serve as a soldier	military
portare	to carry	portable
unus	one	united
urbs	city	urban
verbum	word	verbal

Roman Numerals			
Seven Basic Roman Numerals	Meaning	Other Roman Numerals	Meaning
I	1	II	2
V	5	III	3
X	10	IV	4
L	50	VI	6
C	100	VII	7
D	500	VIII	8
M	1,000	IX	9

37.6 Philosophy and Law

Like art and architecture, Roman philosophy and law were greatly influenced by the Greeks. But the Romans made contributions of their own that they passed on to future generations.

A Philosophy Called Stoicism

Stoicism was a philosophy that came from the Greeks. Many upper-class Romans made it their own.

Stoics believed that a divine (godly) intelligence ruled all of nature. A person's soul was a spark of that divine intelligence.

“Living rightly” meant living in a way that agreed with nature.

To the Stoics, the one truly good thing in life was to have a good character. This meant having virtues such as self-control and courage. Stoics disagreed with those who said that happiness meant only avoiding pain and experiencing pleasure. They prized duty and the welfare of the community over their personal comfort. They said that true happiness was the peace of mind that came from living up to Stoic ideals.

The most famous Roman Stoic was the emperor Marcus Aurelius. Aurelius wrote down his private thoughts in a book he called “To Himself.” Later it was given the title *Meditations*. In his writings, Aurelius constantly reminded himself of Stoic ideals. “Do not worry,” he wrote, “if you encounter ungratefulness, insults, disloyalty, or selfishness. If you think and act rightly, none of these things can hurt you.”

Stoics were famous for bearing pain and suffering bravely and quietly. To this day, we call someone who behaves this way “stoic.”

The emperor Marcus Aurelius reigned from 161 to 180 C.E. His book *Meditations* still inspires people today.



Law and Justice

The Stoics' beliefs about justice and nature fit very well with Roman ideas about law. Roman law covered marriages, inheritances, contracts (agreements) between people, and countless other parts of daily life. Modern law codes in European countries like France and Italy are based in part on ancient Roman laws.

Another legacy of the Romans was the Roman idea of justice. The Romans believed that there was a universal law of justice that came from nature. By this natural law, every person had rights. Romans spread this idea by applying it to all citizens of the empire. Judges in Roman courts tried to make just, or fair, decisions that respected people's rights.

Like people everywhere, the Romans did not always live up to their ideals. Their courts did not treat the poor or slaves as equal to the rich. Emperors often made bad laws. But the ideals of justice and natural rights live on. Like judges in Roman courts, modern-day judges make decisions based on these ideals as well as on written law. Similarly, many people today believe that all humans have basic rights that no written law can take away.



Like the ancient Romans, modern judges are guided both by written law and by ideals of fairness and the rights of citizens.

37.7 Chapter Summary

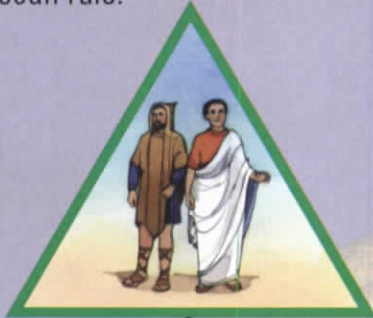
In this chapter, you learned about the fall of the Roman Empire and explored the legacy of ancient Rome. Although the Roman Empire ended more than 1,500 years ago, the Romans greatly influenced our art, architecture, engineering, language, philosophy, and law.

Our exploration of the ancient world started near the very beginning of human history. And it ends here. Or does it? Throughout our journey, we've discovered that the human story is one of change, connection, and continuity. Because our lives have been so influenced by ancient cultures, in some way those great civilizations live on in us today.

Ancient Rome Timeline

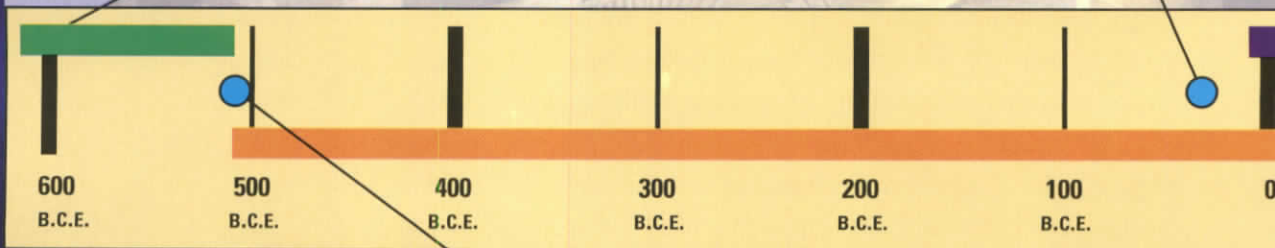
616 – 509 B.C.E.

Two main classes of Roman society, patricians and plebeians, develop under Etruscan rule.



31 B.C.E.

Augustus Caesar becomes the first emperor of Rome.



509 B.C.E.

The Roman Republic is created, giving political rights to patricians but not plebeians.

About 118 – 128 C.E.

The Pantheon, with its huge dome, is built.



100
C.E.

200
C.E.

300
C.E.

400
C.E.

500
C.E.

600
C.E.



About 6 B.C.E. – 27 C.E.

The life and teachings of Jesus lay the foundation of Christianity.



About 509 B.C.E. – 476 C.E.

Romans build 53,000 miles of roads to connect their republic and, later, empire.