

ANCIENT ROME

Introduction

The city of Rome was founded on the banks of the River Tiber, about twenty-four kilometers from the sea. The site covers seven hills and it is likely that the city began as seven small villages, built on the hills for protection.

The centre of ancient Rome was, as in many towns, the marketplace. This was called the Forum. The main street was called the Via Sacra; it ran straight through the Forum.

Rome had a huge population; in 100AD it was about one million, so most streets were narrow in order to fit in more houses. Along some of the wider streets, triumphal arches and columns could be found.

As you went further from the Forum, other huge buildings caught the eye. The Circus Maximus was the racecourse of Rome, while the Colosseum was the stadium where gladiators, wild animals and others provided 'entertainment'. Elsewhere, open air theatres and public baths could be found, and some extraordinary water-carrying bridges called aqueducts.

Housing

Rome was very much a city of nobles or rich people (patricians) and poor people (plebeians). This was clearly seen in their housing, with the rich tending to occupy then slopes of Rome's seven hills and the poor living in the low-lying areas.

Most Romans were poor plebeians who lived in blocks of flats called insulae. These were usually four or five storeys high; often entire families lived in one room. Streets were very narrow and often strewn with rubbish thrown from the flats. Fire was a constant danger, given the hot climate, narrow streets and quite a few thatched roofs. In winter, with no heating or insulation, insulae were often cold and damp.

The homes of the rich were very different. Because of the very hot weather in Italy a Roman house (domus) or large country mansion (villa) tended to be very bright and airy. The entrance a through a hallway called the vestibulum, leading to a central room, called the atrium and an enclosed garden called the peristylum. Around these lay the bedrooms (cubicula), kitchen (culina), a dining room called the triclinium and the masters office (tablinium).

In the houses of the wealthy, tiled pictures called mosaics decorated the walls and floors, keeping the house cool as well as beautiful, and wall paintings (murals),

statues and fountains were also popular. For the winter, some houses even had the central heating (hypocaust) – hot air from a furnace passed under floors and between the walls. Furniture consisted mostly of timber-framed beds, timber stools and couches on which people reclined.

Entertainment

Baths

The public baths were a popular place of recreation - for exercise, bathing, or simply meeting friends. The main rooms were the **frigidarium** (cold), the **tepidarium** (lukewarm) and the **caldarium** (hot). The baths of Caracalla in Rome covered an area of about 11 hectares, the size of a small farm, and could hold 1,600 bathers, while the Baths of Diocletian were said to have held twice as many. Men and women bathed at different times of the day, though Pompeii actually had separate bathing facilities for men and women.

Theatre

The Romans developed a love of the theatre from the Greeks, and built many beautiful theatres in the same semi-circular shape as the Greeks. Some theatres could seat up to 30,000 people on stone steps. Sound quality was so good that Ancient Roman theatres are still used today to stage concerts and recitals. For example, the Roman theatre at Orange in Southern France. It seats up to 9,000 and had three doors through which actors made their entrance or exits. Roman plays were either comedies or tragedies. Large theatres were open air, but some smaller indoor ones called **odeons** were also popular

Education

The children of plebians received little or no education. In the case of patrician children, some were educated at home by their parents or a tutor. However, most patrician children between the ages of seven and twelve attended school (ludus) where they learned reading, writing and arithmetic.

Girls were generally kept at home to learn skills like embroidery and flower arranging from their mothers, while boys went on to a **grammaticus** to study Greek and Roman literature, history, arithmetic and geometry. Further study after this might involve going abroad, particularly to Greece from where many of the slave-teachers in Rome originally came

School lasted from dawn until noon, and many students arrived and left with slave escorts. Writing was usually done with a pointed stylus, scratching words and numbers onto a wax tablet. Paper, made from papyrus reeds, was used only for books and documents. Mathematics were done with the help of an abacus, which is still used by children today. Unsatisfactory students were severely beaten. On the main market day, which took place every eight days, schoolchildren had a day off.

Religion

For over 800 years, the Romans worshipped many gods, just as the Greeks had done before them. Jupiter was the king of the gods and god of the sky. Mars was the god of war; soldiers prayed to him before going into battle. Vulcan was responsible for fire, while Neptune ruled the sea. Those Romans in love prayed to the god Cupid, while Saturn was another popular god, being in charge of the harvest.

The Romans worshipped many goddesses too. Juno, wife of Jupiter was the goddess of women.

All these gods, and many more had temples in their honor the greatest being the Pantheon, which is today used as one of the main Catholic churches (Christianity) in Rome. At these temples, animal sacrifices were regularly offered to the various gods.

The pagan Romans believed in an afterlife, so did most civilizations, including the Celts in Ireland. A coin was placed in the dead persons mouth because the Romans believed you had to pay the legendary ferryman, charon to carry spirits safely to the next life across the River Styx.

Romans abroad

As Rome grew larger, it began to expand into the surrounding countryside in search of valuable farmland to feed its population. Vital to this expansion was, of course, its army. By 295BC central Italy was under Roman control, and in the following years, all of Italy fell before the Roman legions.

Early in the second century BC, Rome began to expand to the east, taking land from the Greeks as far as Syria. in the west, southern France, Spain and Portugal also felt the power of the Roman military.

Other topics on the Roman's abroad are:

The Roman Army

The Roman army had three basic divisions, the century, the cohort and the legion. Eighty to a hundred soldiers formed a century, under the control of a centurion. Six centuries made up a cohort and it took ten cohorts to make up a legion, though overall legion numbers could vary a lot.

Every Roman citizen was expected to serve in the army. Soldiers had to provide and pay for their own equipment. Two types of spear were used, one for throwing and one for thrusting. Swords were short, suitable for close combat, and shields were usually large and rectangular, made from wood or leather. Soldiers usually wore light armour because they needed to move rapidly. Each legion was led by its standard bearer, a position given to only the bravest of soldiers. He carried a pole bearing the silver eagle, the symbol of Rome and the letters SPQR engraved underneath.

Most soldiers were in the infantry (foot soldiers) and others usually the foreign recruits formed the cavalry on horseback, while the artillery consisted of those who fought with heavy weapons such as catapults.

Enemies of Rome

The Gauls of France were powerful enemies of Rome for several centuries. In 390BC, they were so powerful that they occupied the city of Rome itself for a time. It wasn't until the first century BC that Julius Caesar's armies finally overcame them. The most famous leader of the Gauls in their wars with Rome was Vercingetorix.

Carthage was a great civilisation in Northern Africa. The wars between it and Rome were known as the Punic Wars, after the Phoenicians who ruled Carthage. Its greatest general was Hannibal, famous for invading the Roman Empire with a huge army assisted by thirty-seven elephants. Hannibal defeated Rome again and again, most notably at Cannae east of Rome, where 70,000 Romans died as against only 6,000 Carthaginians. However Rome won the war in the end, conquering Carthage itself in 146BC.

Roman Engineering

It is important to remember that Roman's building materials were very different to those in use today, they didn't have reinforced concrete or steel girders, they didn't have cement either. But the Romans spread their building skills throughout the Empire.

Roads

As the Roman Empire spread beyond Rome and Italy, roads were of great importance for both trade and army. Roman soldiers usually marched about 30km a day and needed straight level roads. Where possible especially in the case of major roads, stone slabs were laid on top to provide a smooth surface for carts, chariots and soldiers. Many roads in Europe still follow the lines of the old Roman roads.

Romans at Sea

It seemed that the superiority of the Romans at sea ought to have enabled them to choose the field of battle. The Senate in Rome decided to send one consular army to invade Spain while another would protect Sicily and possibly invade Africa. A praetorian army was allocated to garrison Cisalpine Gaul. The Consul Publius Cornelius Scipio was selected to lead the invasion of Spain. His mission was to confront Hannibal's army there, and, if possible, seize the province for Rome.

While Scipio was preparing to launch his invasion of Spain an uprising of Boii Gauls delayed him. One of his legions was diverted to the Po valley, and he was forced to levy another. When he finally sailed into Massilia, Scipio was shocked to find Hannibal already on the east bank of the Rhone. The consul offered battle, but Hannibal would have none of it since the season was too far advanced. Publius then made what was to be the most critical Roman strategic decision of the entire war. He went back to Italy to take the command against Hannibal, but sent his army on to Spain under the command of his older brother, Gnaeus. It would seem that Gnaeus' position was of doubtful constitutionality, but given the extraordinary circumstances no one was going to complain.

Gnaeus Cornelius Scipio came from one of the pre-eminent patrician families of Rome. After long years of civil and military service, he'd been elected consul in 222, commanding his army with distinction, besieging and taking Acerrae and Mediolanum from the Insubrian Gauls. He was already a seasoned commander when he took over his brother's consular army. His initial mission was to secure a Roman base in northeast Spain. His forces included two legions and allied Italian troops, with a total of 22,000 infantry and 2,200 cavalry. His fleet numbered 60 Roman quinqueremes and a small squadron of Massilian scout ships.

Gnaeus Scipio sailed from Massilia, landing at the friendly Greek port of Emporiae in October 218. He then advanced south, subjugating the coast as far as the already friendly port of Tarraco. Having made it to Spain without opposition, he sent half his fleet back to Rome. He next advanced inland to conquer the local Iberian tribes.

Hanno, though outnumbered more than 2:1, foolishly offered battle near the town of Cissa. Scipio easily crushed the small Carthaginian army, capturing Hanno. Though Hasdrubal was able to raid Tarraco during the winter with a flying column, a Roman base in Spain had been seized and secured and prevented any reinforcements from leaving to help Hannibal.

Roman Building

The Romans were extremely good at building things, roads, buildings, bridges, walls....anything they needed.

They were very well trained, had lots of men to help and always did things the best way, not trying to save time or money.

The Romans invented concrete which meant that they could build much bigger buildings than anyone could have done before. They also used arches a lot to make their buildings very strong.

Hadrians Wall

One of the most famous things that the Romans built was the frontier between England and Scotland, called Hadrians Wall, named after the Emperor who ordered it built.

It was started in 120 A.D. and took nine years to build.

It was built to protect Roman Britain from raids by the Picts and Scots. Those were the tribes that lived in Scotland then. It stretched for over 100Km across Northern Britain, and was 5 metres high and 4 meters wide.

It was built so well, that you can still go and see parts of it today, nearly 2000 years after it was made.

Roman Trade

The Romans divided their empire into provinces, and, where possible, put former Roman consuls in charge of these provinces. Julius Caesar was a governor in Spain and Pontious Pilate controlled Judea. Retired soldiers were given land near the edge of the Empire and in this way they helped to maintain Rome's control in these areas.

Trade was carried on with areas beyond Rome's Empire. Silk was bought from India and China, and perfumes from Arabia. From the Third century BC onwards, trade in all areas controlled by Rome was conducted with the aid of coins. The most widely used coins were the Sestertius and the larger Denarius which was four times as valuable. Julius Caesar actually minted a gold coin called an Aurea, worth 25 Denarii. Roman coins have been found as far apart as Ireland and China.

Roman Food

The diet of the Ancient Romans was quite healthy. Meat was expensive and very difficult to preserve in a hot climate; so it was rarely eaten by the poor. Corn and bread were the staple foods; many a politician rose or fell depending on his success in keeping corn prices down. Romans were very fond of corn-based foods such as porridge and pancakes. Among wealthier Romans chicken and fish were popular. Vegetables and citrus fruits were very plentiful, as indeed was wine.

Breakfast was usually eaten soon after dawn. After midday, Romans relaxed for a few hours to escape the heat of the sun. The main meal, the *cena*, was eaten in the evening and, at it, the day's news, business dealings and politics were discussed.

Roman Clothing

The most common garment among wealthy Romans was the tunica, which resembled a long, button-less shirt tied at the waist. This was worn by men, women and children around the house, with light leather sandals, to keep cool in the warm weather.

In public, however, a patrician's outer garment was his toga. This was a long robe draped over the shoulders and down to the feet. Togas were almost always white, though young patricians wore purple-edged ones. While made of wool, the fact that the togas were white helped to deflect the sun's rays and keep the wearer cool.

A woman wore a long dress called a stola, and when going out, a wrap-around shawl or palla. While wearing the palla over the head might have been warm, sun-tans were to be avoided at all costs by ladies of patrician class – how times change!

Men were usually clean-shaven, though beards were common after 100AD. Women often dyed their hair, and used perfume and make-up. Chalk, for example, was popular for whitening the skin, while ashes were used for darkening the eyebrows.