

Roman Empire an empire that, at its height, around 200 C.E., spanned the Mediterranean world and most of Europe

empire a large territory in which several groups of people are ruled by a single leader or government

corruption a pattern of illegal or immoral activities by government officials

decline a slow breakdown or failure

1.2 The End of the Roman Empire in the West

Rome's first emperor, Caesar Augustus, ended 100 years of civil war and expanded the boundaries of the **Roman Empire**. When he died in 14 C.E., few Romans could imagine that their **empire** would ever end. Yet by the year 500, the western half of the empire had collapsed. What caused the fall of the mighty Roman Empire?

Problems in the Late Empire There was no single reason for the end of the Roman Empire. Instead, historians point to a number of problems that combined to bring about its fall.

Political Instability Rome never solved the problem of how to peacefully transfer political power to a new leader. When an emperor died, ambitious rivals with independent armies often fought each other for control of the empire.

Even when the transfer of power happened without **conflict**, there was no good system for choosing the next emperor. Many times, the Praetorian Guard, the emperor's private army, chose the new ruler. But they frequently chose leaders who would reward them rather than those who were best prepared to be emperor.



In 410 C.E., a Germanic tribe attacked Rome, by then the capital of only the western part of the Roman Empire.

Economic and Social Problems Besides political instability, the empire suffered from economic and social problems. To finance Rome's huge armies, its citizens had to pay heavy taxes. These taxes weakened the economy and drove many people into poverty. Trade also suffered.

Unemployment was a serious problem. Wealthy families used slaves and cheap labor to work their large estates. Small farmers could not compete with the large landowners. They fled to the cities looking for work, but there were not enough jobs for everyone.

Other social problems plagued the empire, including growing **corruption** and a **decline** in the spirit of citizenship. Notorious emperors like Nero and Caligula wasted large amounts of money. A rise in crime made the empire's cities and roads unsafe.

Weakening Frontiers A final problem was the weakening of the empire's frontiers. The huge size of the empire made it hard to defend. It sometimes took weeks for leaders in Rome to communicate with generals. By the

300s C.E., Germanic tribes were pressing hard on the western borders of the empire. Many of these peoples went on to settle inside the empire and were recruited into the army. But often these soldiers had little loyalty to Rome.



The Fall of Rome In 330 C.E., the emperor **Constantine** took a step that changed the future of the Roman Empire. He moved his capital 850 miles east, to the ancient city of Byzantium. He renamed the city New Rome. Later, it was called Constantinople. In modern times it was renamed yet again. Today, it is known as Istanbul, Turkey.

After Constantine's reign, the vast empire was usually ruled by two emperors, one based in Rome and one based in Constantinople. Rome became the capital of just the western part of the empire. Constantinople was the capital of the eastern 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.

In the east, the empire continued for another 1,000 years. Today, we refer to this eastern empire as the Byzantine Empire, after Byzantium, the original name of its capital city.

In western Europe, Rome's fall did not mean the end of Roman civilization. The influence of Rome lived on through the medieval period and all the way to our time. As you read about the legacy of the Romans, think about how ideas and events from the distant past still affect us today.

At its height, the Roman Empire controlled territory all around the coast of the Mediterranean, most of Europe, and large parts of the Middle East.

Constantine Roman emperor who, in 330 C.E., moved the capital to Byzantium and later renamed it Constantinople

1.3 The Legacy of Roman Art

The Romans adopted many features of other cultures and blended them into their own, **unique** 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. Rome played a vital role in passing on this tradition, which has had a major influence on western art.

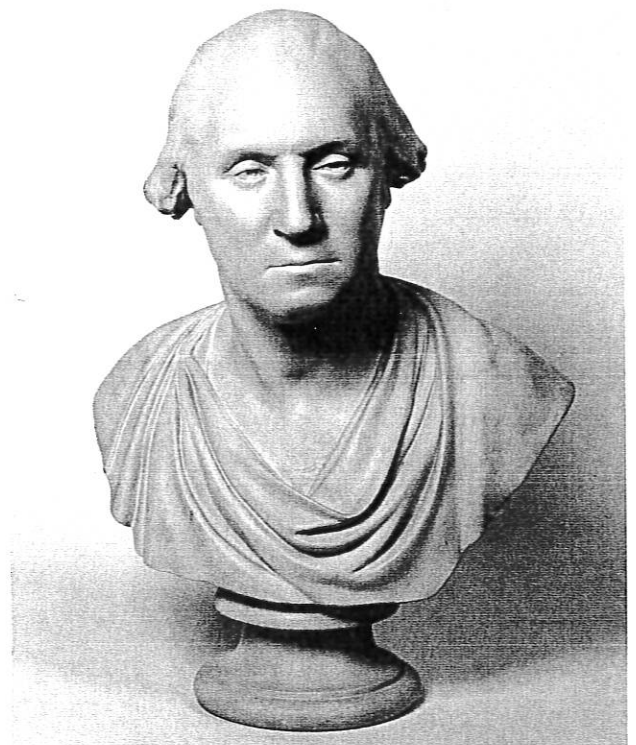
The Romans added their own talents and tastes to what they learned from other cultures. For example, they imitated Greek sculpture, but Roman sculptors were particularly good at making lifelike busts and statues.

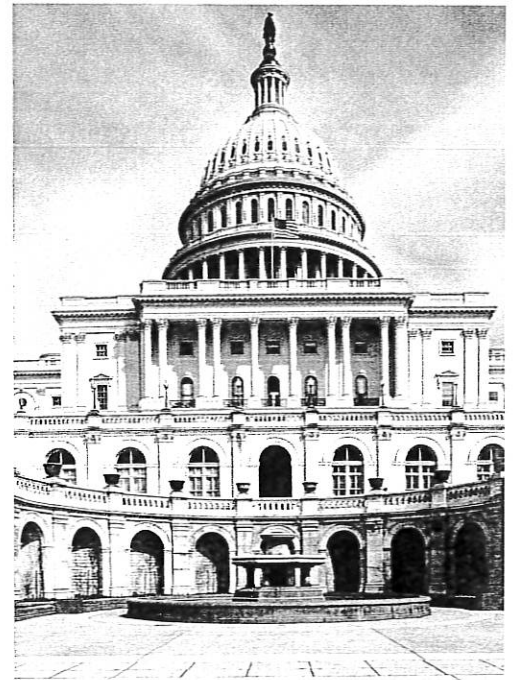
Romans were also great patrons, or sponsors, of art. Wealthy families decorated their homes with statues and colorful murals and **mosaics**. Roman artists were especially skilled in painting frescoes, scenes painted on the moist plaster of walls or ceilings with water-based paints. Roman frescoes often showed three-dimensional landscapes. Looking at one of these frescoes was almost like looking through the wall at a view outside. You’ve probably seen similar murals in restaurants, banks, and other modern public buildings.

The Romans also brought a sense of style and luxury to everyday objects. For example, they made highly decorative bottles of blown glass. A wine bottle might be shaped as a cluster of grapes. The Romans also developed the arts of gem cutting and metalworking.

mosaic a picture made up of small pieces of tile, glass, or colored stone

American artists often adopted a Roman style to add nobility to sculptures and paintings of heroes. Here you see a Roman statue of the emperor Augustus (left) and an American statue of general and first president George Washington (right). How are the statues alike?





The grand style of Roman buildings has inspired many architects through the centuries. Early medieval architects, for example, frequently imitated Roman designs, especially in building great churches and cathedrals. You can also 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.

Another Roman innovation that has been widely copied is the triumphal arch. This is a huge monument built to celebrate great victories or achievements. A famous 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.

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

More than 50,000 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. People in some parts of Europe still drive on highways built over old Roman roads.

The Romans also set a new standard for building aqueducts. They created a system of aqueducts for Rome that brought water from about 60 miles away to the homes of the city's wealthiest citizens, as well as to its 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 Southwest Asia.

The ruins of the Roman Colosseum (left), where gladiators fought for the entertainment of spectators, still stand in Rome today. What features of Roman architecture can you spot in the U.S. Capitol building (right)?

aqueduct a pipe or raised channel built to carry water over a long distance