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# WHO WERE THE ROMANS?



The Romans lived in central Italy, over 2000 years ago. Around 750 BCE, they founded a city, called Rome. It grew fast, and became rich and powerful. Roman soldiers began to fight and conquer peoples living nearby. By 100 CE, the Romans ruled a vast empire that stretched across Europe, North Africa and West Asia. Rome became the greatest city in the world. It had temples, theatres, shopping malls, law courts, market squares, sports arenas, emperors' palaces and grand homes with courtyard gardens. Over a million people lived there.

A young man from Roman North Africa, painted around 2000 years ago.



Rome and its empire, around 100 CE.

Augustus became the first emperor of Rome in 27 BCE. He is holding a scroll (rolled-up document) to show his power as a ruler and law-maker.



**DID YOU KNOW?**  
IN A ROMAN LEGEND, ROME WAS BUILT BY TWINS CALLED ROMULUS AND REMUS WHO HAD BEEN BROUGHT UP BY A WOLF.

## ROMAN LEGACY

Roman writers, thinkers, artists, law-makers, builders and engineers created a splendid civilization. It was based on their own traditions mixed with ideas borrowed from their neighbours, the Ancient Greeks. It lasted for over 1000 years. Many Roman ideas, inventions and designs have survived and are still important today, such as the alphabet we use, piped water and central heating. People in many lands still use Roman words and have Roman names such as Marcus, Antony and Julia.

# CITIZENS AND RULERS

Roman people were divided by birth into two groups: citizens and non-citizens. Male citizens could **vote**, own property and get **welfare benefits**. Women and non-citizens did not have these rights. In law, women belonged to their husbands or fathers. Even so, they ran homes, set up businesses and organized political plots. All people in the empire were made citizens in 212 CE.



## DID YOU KNOW?

EMPEROR CALIGULA (37-41 CE) MADE HIS HORSE PRIME MINISTER. EMPEROR NERO (54-68 CE) SET FIRE TO ROME, THEN SANG AS HE WATCHED IT BURN.

▲ Before a Roman feast, slaves helped guests take off their outdoor clothes – and washed their feet!

## SLAVES AND FOREIGNERS

Thousands of slaves lived in Rome and its empire, together with many foreigners. None had citizen's rights. Slaves were bought, were captured in war or had parents who were slaves. They could be freed by their owners, or buy their freedom. (After this, they were known as freed men or women.) Foreigners came to the empire to find work or as traders.

## ALL-POWERFUL EMPERORS

Rome was first ruled by kings but in 509 BCE it became a **republic**. It was governed by officials chosen by the citizens, and by the Senate – a group of rich, powerful men. From 27 BCE, Rome and its empire was ruled by emperors. Some emperors ruled well, some were mad and some were weak or evil. After they died, all were honoured as gods.



▲ Laurel-leaf crowns were symbols of victory and superhuman power. Emperors and top athletes wore them.

## GLOSSARY

**ancestors** Family members who lived and died many years ago.

**aqueduct** A high bridge designed to carry water over land.

**arena** A big building with many rows of seats around a large open area. Designed for playing and watching sports and gladiator contests.

**barracks** A large building for soldiers to live in.

**campaign** Organized army action, such as a long march or an invasion.

**concrete** A Roman building material made by mixing crushed stone with water and leaving the mixture to set. Today, concrete is made from sand, gravel, cement and water.

**emperor** All-powerful ruler of the Roman Empire.

**extinct** A plant or animal which no longer exists.

**fired** When clay is baked in a very big, very hot oven to make bricks or pottery.

**forts** Big army camps where Roman soldiers lived in conquered lands.

**foundations** Bottom layer of a building which supports everything above it.

**inscriptions** Writing carved on stone.

**legions** Units in the Roman army, containing around 5000 soldiers.

**reign** Length of time that a ruler stays in power.

**republic** System of government without a king or emperor. It gives power to ordinary people.

**sacrifice** Killing people or animals to please the gods.

**scribe** Trained man or woman who reads and writes to earn a living.

**strigil** A body scraper with a curved blade, also used by the Ancient Greeks.

**surveyor** Person skilled at measuring buildings and land.

**synchronize** Set to the same time.

**toga** Large piece of fabric worn by Roman senators and emperors, also worn by citizens on special occasions.

**troop** A group of soldiers.

**vote** Choose a leader or a representative.

**welfare benefits** Food or money given by governments to people in need to help them survive.

**worship** To respect or love a god.

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