



Chapter 38

The Legacy of Rome in the Modern World

To what extent does ancient Rome influence us today?

38.1 Introduction

In this chapter, you will learn about contributions the Romans made to the modern world. These were in the areas of art, architecture, engineering, language, government, and the law.

In the year 1764, long after the Roman Empire had fallen, a young Englishman named Edward Gibbon visited the city of Rome. Gibbon saw the ruins of ancient buildings, such as 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 about the Roman Empire. More than twenty 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*. It became a very important work of history.

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 came apart. Then you will learn how Rome’s influence lives on in modern architecture, art, engineering, language, philosophy, and law.

◀ The U.S. Capitol dome shows the influence of Roman architecture.



The ancient Roman Pantheon is one example of Roman architecture and engineering that has influenced modern buildings.

38.2 The End of the Empire in the West

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

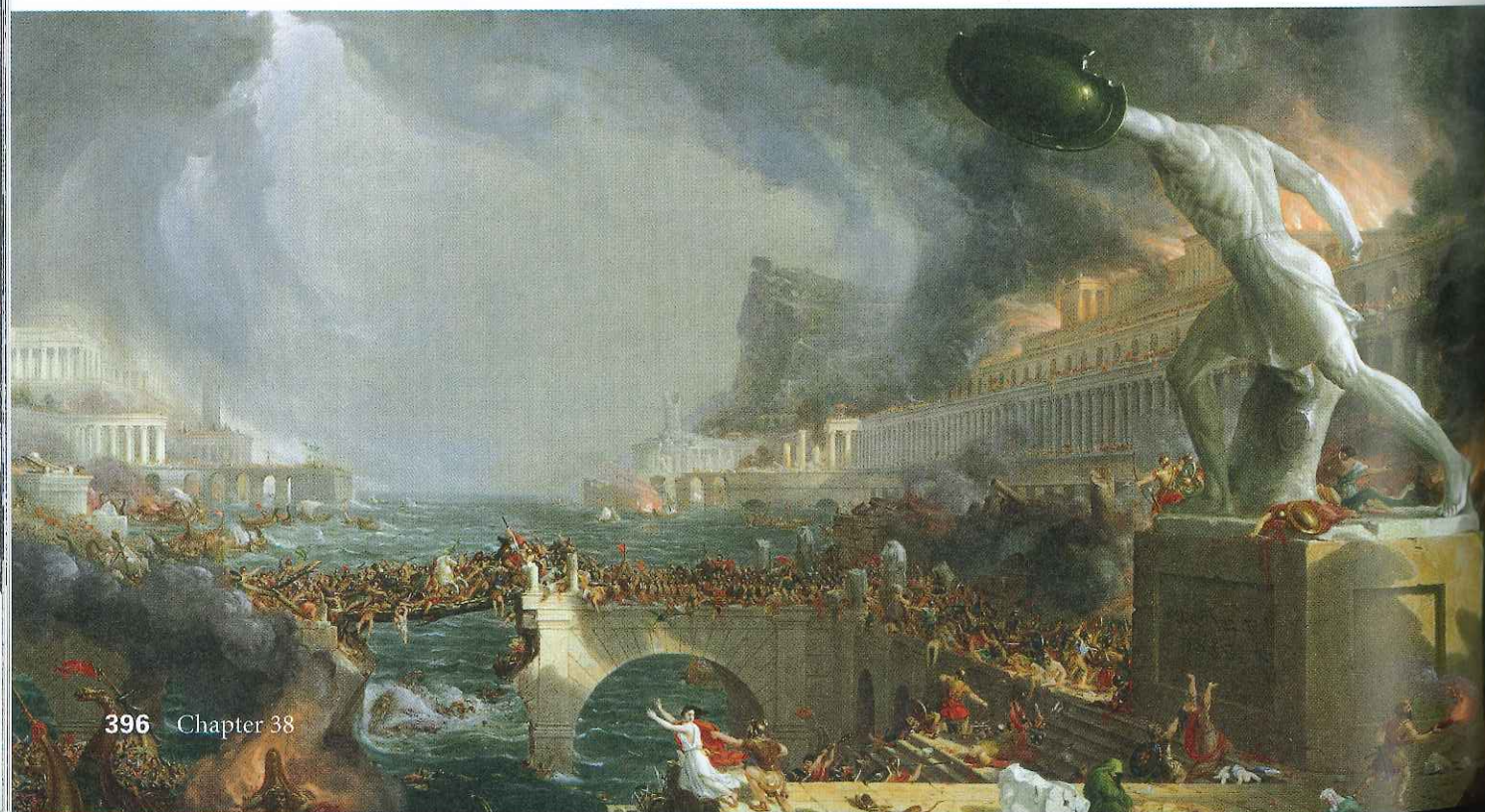
Problems in the Late Empire Most modern historians believe that a number of problems combined to bring about Rome's fall. Here are three of the main reasons.

Political Instability Rome never solved the problem of how to peacefully transfer political power to a new leader. When the emperor died, rivals might fight each other to replace him. Real power fell into the hands of the armies, who could help leaders seize power—or destroy them. Sometimes, rivals did not wait for an emperor to die. Emperors were regularly murdered.

Economic and Social Issues Political instability led to other problems. To finance Rome's huge armies, citizens had to pay heavy taxes. These taxes hurt the economy and drove many people into poverty. Trade also suffered.

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. Many of these people settled inside the empire and were recruited into the army. But these soldiers often had little loyalty to Rome.

As shown in the painting below, the city of Rome was attacked and looted in 410 C.E. by a Germanic tribe. In 476 C.E., the last emperor in Rome lost his throne. This is the event that Gibbon marked as the official fall of the western Roman Empire.



Western Europe and the Byzantine Empire, About 500 C.E.



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 (bih-ZAN-tee-uhm), in what is now Turkey. He renamed the city New Rome. Later it was called Constantinople. Today, it is known as Istanbul.

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.

Soon, Rome itself was threatened by Germanic tribes. In 410 C.E., the Visigoths attacked and looted the city. Finally, in 476, the last emperor in the west, Romulus Augustus, lost his throne to a Germanic leader, Odoacer (OH-duh-way-sir). Then, 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.

By the year 500, the Roman Empire had split in two, and the western half was collapsing into separate kingdoms.

Byzantine Empire the name for the eastern Roman Empire, located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia; it lasted from about 500 to 1453 C.E.

patron a person who promotes artistic activities by paying for new works and supporting artists

38.3 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.

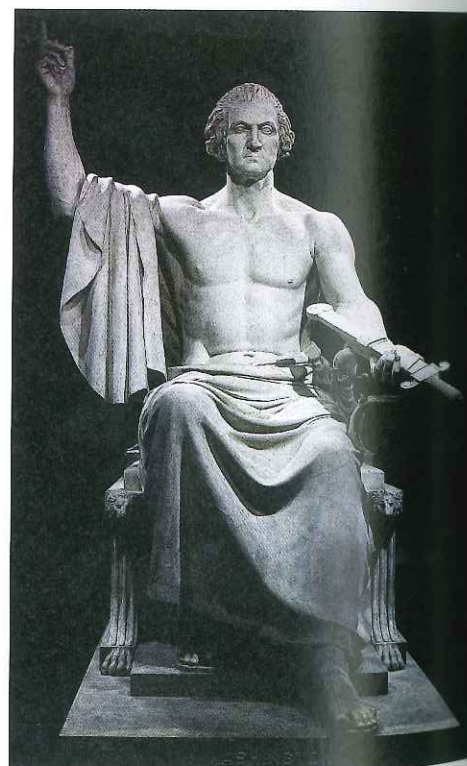
The Romans were skilled in creating realistic statues. They imitated Greek sculpture, but they were particularly good at making their sculptures true to life.

The homes of wealthy Romans were decorated with colorful murals and mosaics. Again, the Romans took existing artforms 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 have probably seen similar murals in modern restaurants, banks, on the sides of buildings, and in other public places.

Romans were also great **patrons**, or 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**.

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



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

A famous example is the 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. For example, many statues in the capital, Washington, D.C., 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. For example, a bottle might be shaped like 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 raised, carved portrait of a person's head or a carved scene. The Romans wore cameos as jewelry and used them to decorate vases and other objects, such as vases. You can find examples of all these art forms today.

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

Renaissance a great flowering of culture based on classical Greek and Roman ideas that began in Italy around 1300 and spread throughout Europe



The Roman Colosseum has inspired stadium builders throughout history.

38.4 Architecture and Engineering

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

Architecture The Romans learned how to use the arch, the vault, and the dome. A vault is an arch used to support a roof. A dome is a series of vaults that form a high, rounded roof.

The Romans were the first to make widespread use of concrete. They made it by mixing broken stone with sand, cement, and water and then allowing the mixture to harden. With the use of 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, now a church that still stands in Rome, is famous for its huge dome.

The Romans also invented a new kind of building, a stadium. This was a large, open-air structure. 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.



Roman arches (left) have been copied and adapted around the world. The Arc de Triomphe in France (right) is one famous modern example.

The grand style of Roman buildings has inspired many architects throughout the centuries. One Roman innovation that was widely copied is the **triumphal arch**. This is a huge monument built to celebrate great victories or achievements. One 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. It includes arches, columns, and a dome.

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

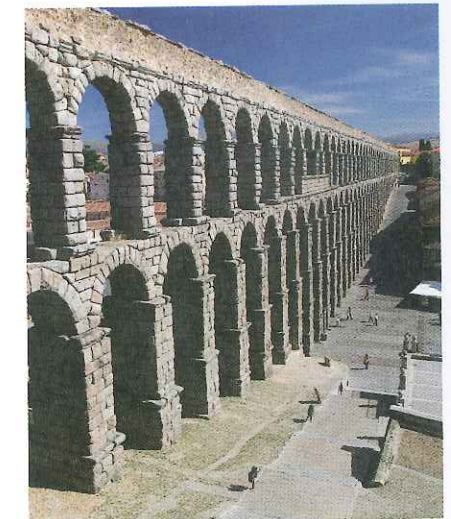
About fifty thousand miles of road connected Rome with the frontiers of the empire. The Romans built their roads with layers of stone, sand, and gravel. Their techniques set the standard of road building for 2,000 years. In some parts of Europe, vehicles still drive on freeways built over old Roman roads.

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 improved it. They created a system of aqueducts for Rome. The aqueducts brought water from about sixty 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. Remains of Roman aqueducts can also be seen in Europe, North Africa, and Asia Minor.

triumphal arch a large monument in the shape of an arch that celebrates a leader or a military victory

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

Ancient Roman aqueducts were so well built that some still stand in Europe today.



Latin the language originally spoken in ancient Rome, on which many words in modern languages are based

38.5 Language

One legacy of Rome that affects us every day is the Roman language, **Latin**. We use the Latin alphabet, although Roman Latin used 23 letters, and English uses 26. Many of our words come from Latin. Latin proverbs are still in use. For example, look at the reverse side of a U.S. dime. You will see the words *E pluribus unum*. It is Latin for “out of many, one.” This is the official motto of the United States. The motto reminds Americans of how the colonies joined together to form the United States.

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 in many words we use today. For example, 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 month” in Latin.

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* (“to fasten” or “to attach”). The table on the opposite page shows other examples.

As you can see from the table, other English words come from Latin root words. For instance, *manual* developed 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 bottom section of the table. You may see Roman numerals, such as these, on clocks, sundials, and the first pages of books, like this one. You might also find 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 means $5 + 3 = 8$ and XX means $10 + 10 = 20$. Putting a letter *before* a letter with a greater value subtracts its value. For example, IV means $5 - 1 = 4$ and IX means $10 - 1 = 9$.

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



The Roman Legacy in Modern Words and Numerals

Latin Prefixes

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

Latin Roots

| Latin | Meaning | English Words |
|--------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| anima | life, breath, soul | animal, animated |
| 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 | verb, verbal |

Roman Numerals

| Basic Numerals | Meaning | Other 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 |

Stoicism a philosophy that flourished in ancient Greece and Rome and that focused on developing virtue, self-control, and courage as a way to achieve happiness

The emperor Marcus Aurelius reigned from 161 to 180 C.E. His book on the practice of Stoicism still inspires people today.



38.6 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.

Philosophy Many Romans followed a philosophy known as **Stoicism** (STOH-ih-sism). First developed by the ancient Greeks, this system of thinking was adopted by the ancient Romans and followed until about 200 C.E.

Stoics believed that a divine intelligence ruled all of nature. A person's soul was a spark of that divine intelligence. Stoics believed that the right way to live was in a way that agrees with nature and its laws.

To the Stoics, the key to life was to have a good character. This meant having virtues such as self-control and courage. Sto-

ics disagreed with those who said that happiness meant only avoiding pain and only experiencing pleasure. They highly prized duty and the welfare of the community over their personal comfort. They believed 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 retitled *Meditations*. In his writings, Aurelius constantly reminded himself of Stoic ideals. He said not to worry 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 in this way a "stoic."

Law and Justice The Stoics' beliefs about justice and nature fit very well with Roman ideas about law. Roman law covered marriages, inheritances, contracts, and countless other aspects of daily life. Modern law codes in European countries, such as France and Italy, are partly based on Roman laws.

Another legacy of the Romans was their concept of justice. The Romans believed that nature provides a universal law of justice. Under this **natural law**, they believed, every person has natural 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 individual rights.

Like most people, the Romans did not always live up to their ideals. Their courts did not treat the poor or slaves equally with the rich. Emperors often made bad laws. But the Roman ideals of justice and natural law live on. The U.S. Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution were influenced by Roman ideas about law and government. 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.

natural law the concept that there is a universal order built into nature that can guide moral thinking

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, you learned about the fall of Rome and explored its legacy.

The End of the Empire in the West By 500, the Roman Empire had split. The eastern empire lasted for over 1,000 years. But the western empire collapsed due to political instability, economic and social issues, and the weakening of the frontiers.

Art Modern artists still follow Roman or Greco-Roman styles in the arts. Murals and mosaics, much like Roman ones, decorate modern buildings and public spaces.

Architecture and Engineering Roman architectural influences are seen in the structures of many modern buildings. The Romans also were talented engineers, whose construction methods and standards lasted thousands of years.

Language Many words and word parts in modern languages, such as English, French, and Spanish, came from Latin. Roman numerals appear today on clocks, in books, and in movie credits.

Philosophy and Law Roman ideals, such as Stoicism, the rule of law, and justice, shaped law and government in many modern nations. Examples include today's law courts and documents, such as the U.S. Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution.