

INTRODUCTION

Despite Europe's relatively small size, the people of this region have had an enormous impact on world culture. Much of what we see around us today—the world's art, architecture, literature, forms of government, and even the way many of us think—has been strongly affected by the **legacy** of western Europe. For example, many modern sports arenas use domes and look like the Colosseum, a stadium built by the Romans.

Europe was shaped not just by the Greeks and Romans in ancient times, however. During the early Middle Ages, the Germanic peoples had much more influence. Their gradual conversion to Christianity, for example, utterly changed medieval European society. Three of these peoples—the Franks, the Anglo-Saxons, and the Vikings—as well as the Celtic people of Ireland, each made a unique contribution to the development of western European civilization.

legacy: knowledge and culture passed down from one generation or civilization to another

THE MEDITERRANEAN WORLD

The history of western European civilization began thousands of years ago on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. The Mediterranean environment had everything necessary to sustain large numbers of people: fertile soil, plenty of rainfall and sunshine, and a climate that was moderate, neither too hot nor too cold. This meant that plants had a long growing season and that a surplus of food could be produced. The population grew rapidly and towns formed.

The Mediterranean Sea itself formed a transportation route that encouraged people to travel widely to trade and to learn from each other. Ideas from the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and Europe spread easily. All civilizations flourish and grow stronger through fresh ideas.

The two most important early European civilizations were those of Greece and Rome. The Greeks eagerly studied **philosophy**, which is usually

defined as the pursuit of ideas. They also made great advances in art, architecture, drama, literature, medicine, and science. In the fourth century B.C.E., Alexander the Great conquered many lands and spread Greek culture as far east as India.

The Greek Empire weakened and fell to the Romans about 150 B.C.E. Because they admired the accomplishments of the Greeks, the Romans borrowed Greek attitudes and learning and made them their own. They gathered thinkers and builders from Asia, eastern Europe, and the Middle East. In addition, they became superb organizers, developing such systems as aqueducts to deliver running water, road networks, and military organizations. The **Roman Legions** were so powerful that the Roman Empire at its peak controlled most of Europe, southeast Asia, and northern Africa. For more than six centuries, the Mediterranean world and the Roman Empire were really one and the same.

philosophy: the search for ideas, wisdom, knowledge

B.C.E.: before the common era

Roman Legions: Roman armed forces

DID YOU KNOW?

The roots of European civilization go deep. Herodotus, for example, a famous Greek historian, repeatedly indicates Greece's debt to ancient Egypt.

Figure 1-1 The shaded area in this map shows the extent of the Roman Empire about 150 c.e. How would the extensive network of roads have helped the empire stay united? What would have been involved in designing this system of roads? Think about materials, organizational techniques, labour, and time.



c.e.: of the common era

architecture: the art and science of designing buildings

Latin: the language of the Romans. During the Middle Ages, Latin served as a common language for educated people throughout Europe.

gladiator: a fighter who battled at public shows; most were slaves

THE ROMANS

Under the Romans, western European culture flourished like never before. The Romans admired the achievements of the ancient Greeks, so they copied and developed Greek arts and architecture. They also built great

cities decorated with works of art, magnificent gardens, arenas, public baths, and theatres. The Romans were a highly literate people. Roman scholars and poets wrote thousands of books, and great libraries were filled with ancient works from Greece and Egypt. Latin provided a common language for the whole empire.

The Romans developed a code of laws for all the peoples they ruled. Some Canadian laws and rules of justice are based on these Roman laws. For example, all Roman citizens had the right to a fair trial and to rescue

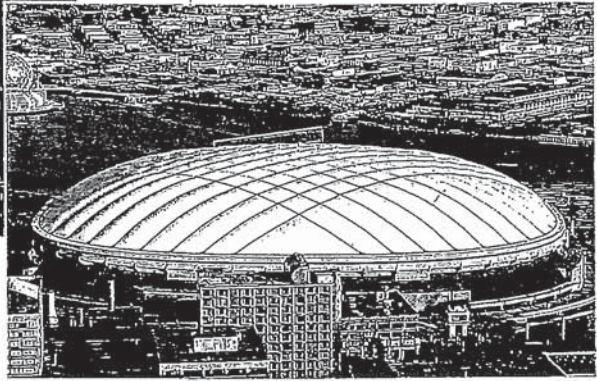
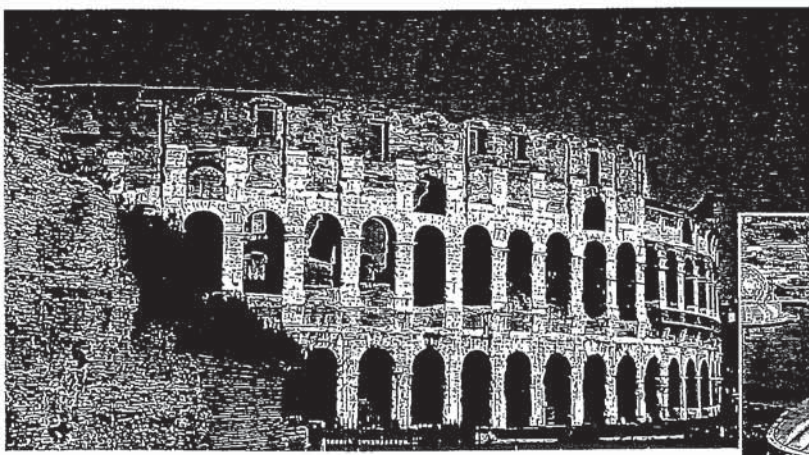


Figure 1-2 The Roman Colosseum (at left) could seat 50 000 spectators, only slightly fewer than the 60 000 that fit into Vancouver's BC Place (at right). The Colosseum was the scene of executions, mock naval battles, and combats between gladiators. People were eaten alive by wild animals. Were these "entertainments" examples of civilization? Why or why not?

from poverty. Within the borders of the empire, Roman law protected all peoples from war and from violent outlaws on land and pirates at sea. The *Pax Romana*, or Roman peace, encouraged trade and the exchange of ideas. Of course, a price was paid: Rome demanded taxes, slaves, and submission from all the lands it controlled. Further, not everyone benefited under Roman law. Women, non-Romans, and slaves were all denied the rights of Roman citizenship.

The Fall of Rome

In the year 410 C.E., the Mediterranean world was shocked by news that the city of Rome, the centre of European civilization, had been conquered by the Goths, a Germanic people. The impossible had happened. The Roman Empire, which had once stretched from Iran to Scotland and from Upper Egypt to the North Sea, had collapsed. Only the Eastern Roman Empire, with its capital in Constantinople, remained strong.

Historians often disagree about why Rome fell. Some believe that all civilizations have a life span and that they eventually grow old and die, almost like living things.

After the Fall

Though the accomplishments of Greek and Roman civilizations were great, they were to be lost for centuries after the fall of Rome. Only through the foresight and determination of individuals did Roman culture survive in isolated monasteries and distant lands. Ages later, Greek and Roman art, architecture, drama, literature, sports, mythology, philosophy, laws, and systems of government would all be reborn in various forms to inspire and enrich modern civilizations. But first, Europe experienced a period the Romans would have called "barbarous."

For centuries Rome had been in contact with Germanic peoples to the north and east. These peoples were known to the Greeks and Romans as

DID YOU KNOW?

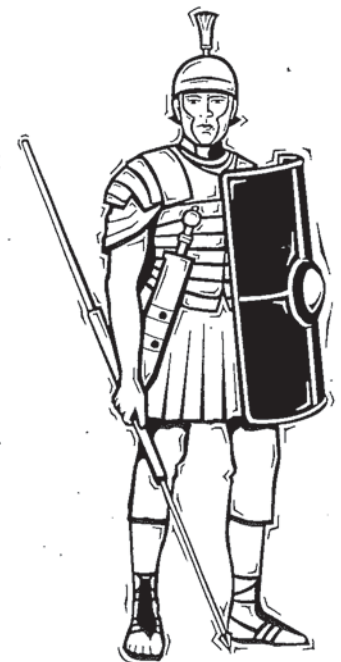
At one time, years in European history were classified into two eras: B.C. (before Christ) and A.D. (*anno Domini*, Latin for "in the year of the Lord"). Today B.C. is replaced by B.C.E. (before the common era), and A.D. is replaced by C.E. (of the common era). Why do you think historians started using the modern terms?

Germanic people: one of the European peoples that spoke a Germanic language; for example, the Teutones, Visigoths, Angles, Saxons, Jutes, Franks, and Ostrogoths

Why Did Rome Fall?

The death of an empire is usually caused by a combination of internal forces (those coming from inside) and external forces (those coming from outside). Historians think that the following forces contributed to Rome's fall. Classify each as an internal or external force.

- ◆ Small businesses suffered when Romans began using slaves to supply goods and services.
- ◆ Romans spent more money than they should have on entertainment and expensive luxuries.
- ◆ Contagious diseases, brought to Rome by soldiers in the Roman Legions, killed thousands.
- ◆ After the Roman republic ended in 30 B.C.E., Rome was ruled by emperors rather than a government that respected individual freedom.
- ◆ Because the empire was so large and contained such a wide variety of terrain, the empire became impossible to defend.
- ◆ New religions weakened the will of the Roman people to defend their empire, because many chose their new religion over Rome.
- ◆ The empire grew weak because of repeated attacks by the Germanic peoples.



Barbarian: originally, a non-Roman person. "Barbarian" later came to mean "uncultured person," an insult.

Barbarians, meaning "people who speak an unfamiliar language." In other words, a Barbarian was anyone not Greek or Roman. As the Western Roman Empire collapsed and the Roman Legions withdrew to Rome, Germanic peoples moved into Roman provinces such as Gaul (France), Britain, and Spain. These peoples—Angles, Saxons, Jutes, Goths, Vandals, Lombards, and Franks—were attracted to the riches of the Roman Empire. They pushed out the original populations of Celtic peoples and other native peoples and lived by their own laws, customs, and religions.

Civilization in western Europe began to wither away. Roads fell into disrepair; travel became dangerous; cities decayed and were deserted.

Soon few people could read or write except monks in isolated monasteries. Western Europe slipped into an age of chaos and savagery, torn by violence and ignorance. A kind of gang warfare prevailed.

The glory of Rome became a memory, and, strangely, a dream for the future. Local rulers tried again and again to rekindle the fire of civilization, the fire that they themselves had helped put out. This time of turmoil lasted from approximately 476 C.E., when the last Roman emperor lost his power, to 800. In that year, Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne Emperor of the Romans, and the slow crawl back to organized, widespread civilization began.

ACTIVITIES

1. Create a brochure for the Mediterranean region in 150 C.E. that describes its climate and physical features and tells why many people live there. By consulting an encyclopedia or atlas, find out the average summer and winter temperatures and rainfall in the region. What features of the region support farming? And trade? Illustrate your brochure with drawings, cartoons, or charts. If possible, create your brochure using desktop publishing software.
2. Compare the map of the Roman Empire (Figure 1-1) with a modern map of the same area. What modern countries and major cities exist within the former boundaries of the Roman Empire?
3. Give three reasons why Rome succeeded as a civilization.
4. The Roman city of Pompeii was buried by the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79 C.E. The painting shown on page 8 was discovered during archaeological digs at the site. Look carefully at the picture. What do you think these two people were like? Why do we value ancient works of art?
5. Describe Rome's legacy to future generations, giving at least five examples.
6. Assume you are the editor of your community newspaper. In the previous issue, you asked readers to write in with suggestions for events that could be held at the local sports stadium, which needs to make money or it will close.
 - a) You receive a letter that calls for a revival of the "entertainments" ancient Romans watched in the Roman Colosseum. Write a one-page response to this letter explaining why you agree or disagree. In your arguments, you could refer to Canadian laws, what you feel would be the response of most members of your community, and your own personal beliefs.
 - b) The following week, you receive a letter that proposes weekly boxing and wrestling matches in the cash-strapped stadium. How do you respond?
7. Identify four possible symptoms of a declining civilization. The Roman Empire was not the only civilization to rise, flourish, and then decline. Identify a present-day civilization that shows symptoms of decline.
8. Describe what happened to Europe after Rome fell.