

5 Rome and the Roots of Western Civilization

TERMS & NAMES

- Greco-Roman culture
- Pompeii
- Virgil
- Tacitus
- aqueduct

MAIN IDEA

The Romans developed many ideas and institutions that became fundamental to Western civilization.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Evidence of Roman culture is found throughout Europe and North America and in Asia and Africa.

SETTING THE STAGE Romans borrowed and adapted cultural elements freely, especially from the Greek and Hellenistic cultures. Rome created a great civilization, whose art and architecture, language and literature, engineering, and law became its legacy to the world.

The Legacy of Greco-Roman Civilization

Under the Roman Empire, hundreds of territories were knitted into a single state. Each Roman province and city was governed in the same way. The Romans were proud of their ability to rule, but they acknowledged Greek leadership in the fields of art, architecture, literature, and philosophy.

By the second century B.C., Romans had conquered Greece and had come to greatly admire Greek culture. Educated Romans learned the Greek language. As Horace, a Roman poet said, “Greece, once overcome, overcame her wild conqueror.” The mixing of elements of Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman culture produced a new culture, called **Greco-Roman culture**. This is also often called classical civilization.

Roman artists, philosophers, and writers did not merely copy their Greek and Hellenistic models. They adapted them for their own purposes and created a style of their own. Roman art and literature came to convey the Roman ideals of strength, permanence, solidity.

Roman Fine Arts Romans learned the art of sculpture from the Greeks. However, while the Greeks were known for the beauty and idealization of their sculpture, Roman sculptors created realistic portraits in stone. Much Roman art was practical in purpose, intended for public education.

The reign of Augustus was a period of great artistic achievement. At that time the Romans further developed a type of sculpture called bas-relief. In bas-relief, or low-relief, images project from a flat background. Roman sculptors used bas-relief to tell stories and to represent crowds of people, soldiers in battle, and landscapes. (See Trajan’s Column on page 169.)

Roman artists were particularly skilled in creating mosaics. Mosaics were pictures or designs made by setting small pieces of stone, glass, or tile onto a surface. Most Roman villas, the country houses of the wealthy, had at least one colored mosaic.

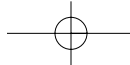
THINK THROUGH HISTORY

A. Summarizing

What were the origins of Greco-Roman culture?

Gladiators and leopards fight to the death in this third-century mosaic.





Romans also excelled at the art of painting. Most wealthy Romans had bright, large murals, called frescoes, painted directly on their walls. Few have survived. The best examples of Roman painting are found in the Roman town of **Pompeii**, and date from as early as the second century B.C. In A.D. 79, Mount Vesuvius erupted, covering Pompeii in a thick layer of ash and killing about 2,000. The ash acted to preserve many buildings and works of art.

Learning and Literature Romans borrowed much of their philosophy from the Greeks. Stoicism, the philosophy of the Greek teacher Zeno, was especially influential. Stoicism encouraged virtue, duty, moderation, and endurance. One of the most noted Stoics was the emperor Marcus Aurelius. His steadfastness is shown in his *Meditations*: “In the midst of it all, you must take your stand, good-temperedly and without disdain.”

In literature, as in philosophy, the Romans found inspiration in the works of the Greeks. Writers used Roman themes and ideas while following Greek forms and models.

The poet **Virgil** spent ten years writing the most famous work of Latin literature, the *Aeneid* (ih·NEE·ihd), the epic of the legendary Aeneas. Virgil modeled the *Aeneid*, written in praise of Rome and Roman virtues, after the Greek epics of Homer. Here he speaks of government as being Rome’s most important contribution to civilization:

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

... Romans, never forget that government is your medium! Be this your art:—to practice men in habit of peace, Generosity to the conquered, and firmness against aggressors.

VIRGIL, *Aeneid*

While Virgil’s writing carries all the weight and seriousness of the Roman character, the poet Ovid wrote light, witty poetry for enjoyment. In the *Amores*, Ovid relates that he can only compose when he is in love: “When I was from Cupid’s passions free, my Muse was mute and wrote no elegy.”

The Romans also wrote excellent prose, especially history. Livy compiled a multi-volume history of Rome from its origins to 9 B.C. He used legends freely, creating more of a national myth of Rome than a true history. **Tacitus** (TAS·ih·tuhs), another Roman historian, is notable among ancient historians because he presented the facts accurately. He also was concerned about the Romans’ lack of morality. In his *Annals* and *Histories*, he wrote about the good and bad of imperial Rome.

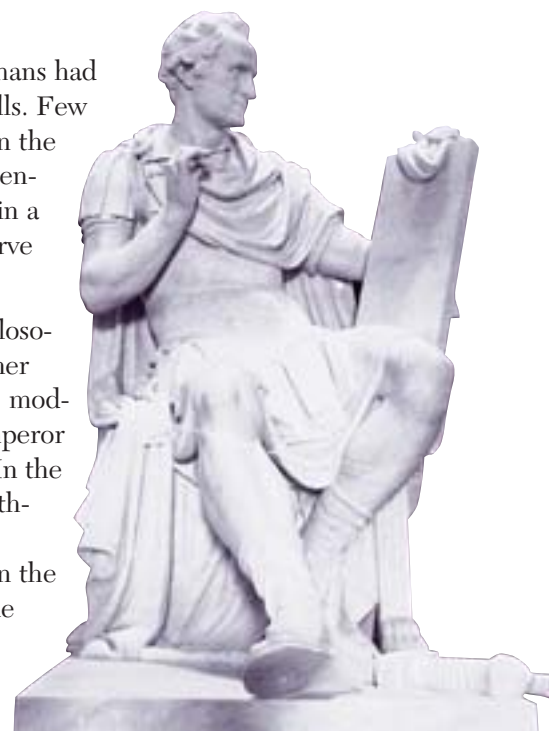
Roman Achievements

The presence of Rome is still felt daily in the languages, the institutions, and the thought of the Western world.

Latin, the Language of Rome Latin remained the language of learning in the West long after the fall of Rome. It was the official language of the Roman Catholic Church into the 20th century.

Latin was adopted by different peoples and developed into French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and Romanian. These languages are called Romance languages because of their common Roman heritage. Latin also influenced other languages. For example, more than half the words in English have a basis in Latin.

Architecture, Engineering, and Technology Visitors from all over the empire marveled at the architecture of Rome. The arch, the dome, and concrete were combined to build spectacular structures, such as the Colosseum.

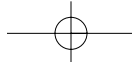


The Roman influence can be seen in this neoclassic 19th-century sculpture of George Washington in toga and tunic.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

B. Supporting

Opinions What is your opinion of Virgil’s statement that government was Rome’s most important contribution to civilization? Support your opinion.

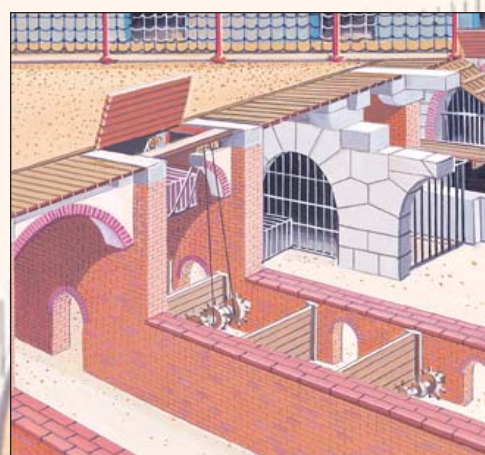


The Colosseum

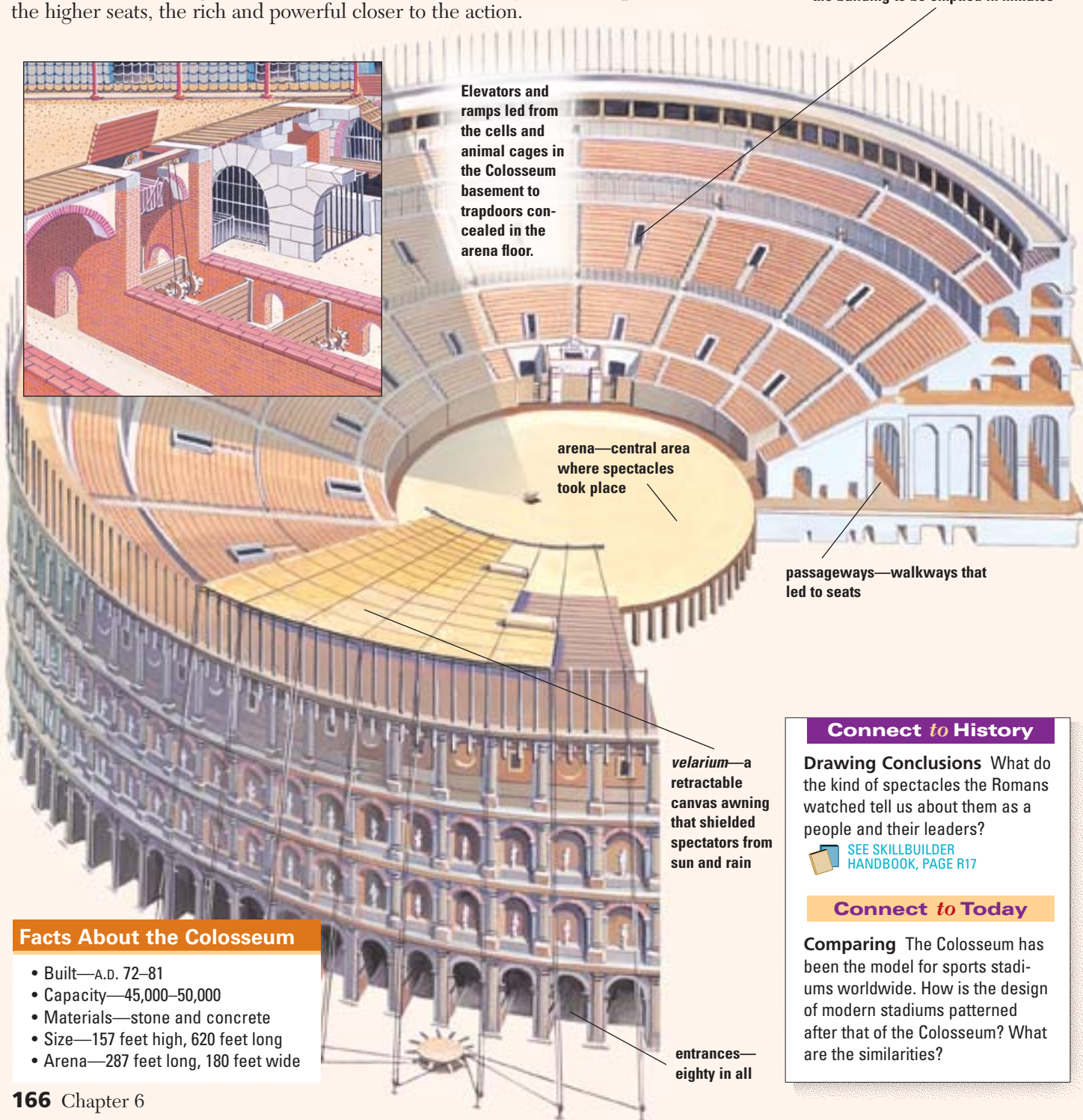
The Colosseum was one of the greatest feats of Roman engineering and a model for the ages. The name comes from the Latin word *colossus*, meaning “gigantic.” Its construction was started by the Emperor Vespasian and was completed by his sons, emperors Titus and Domitian. For centuries after its opening in A.D. 80, excited spectators, both rich and poor, cheered a variety of free, bloody spectacles presented for their entertainment. Gladiator fought gladiator to the death. Wild animals were hunted and slaughtered. Christians were devoured by lions. The poor sat in the higher seats, the rich and powerful closer to the action.



The Colosseum in Rome as it appears today.



Elevators and ramps led from the cells and animal cages in the Colosseum basement to trapdoors concealed in the arena floor.



exits—giant staircases that allowed the building to be emptied in minutes

arena—central area where spectacles took place

passageways—walkways that led to seats

velarium—a retractable canvas awning that shielded spectators from sun and rain

entrances—eighty in all

Facts About the Colosseum

- Built—A.D. 72–81
- Capacity—45,000–50,000
- Materials—stone and concrete
- Size—157 feet high, 620 feet long
- Arena—287 feet long, 180 feet wide

Connect to History

Drawing Conclusions What do the kind of spectacles the Romans watched tell us about them as a people and their leaders?

 SEE SKILLBUILDER HANDBOOK, PAGE R17

Connect to Today

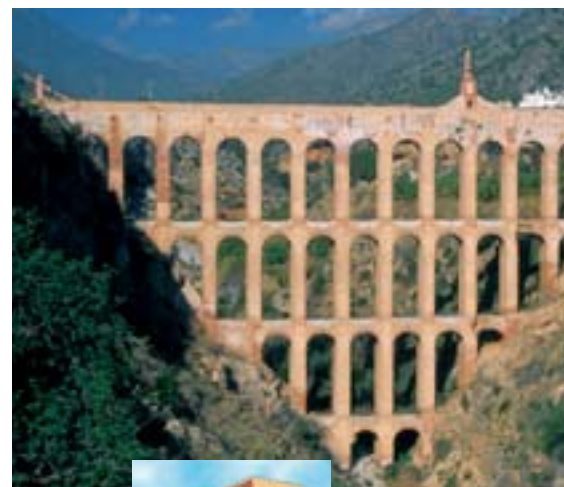
Comparing The Colosseum has been the model for sports stadiums worldwide. How is the design of modern stadiums patterned after that of the Colosseum? What are the similarities?



Arches also supported bridges and aqueducts. **Aqueducts** were designed by Roman engineers to bring water into cities and towns. When the water channel spanned a river or ravine, the aqueduct was lifted high up on arches.

Because Roman architectural forms were so practical, they have remained popular. Thomas Jefferson began a Roman revival in the United States in the 18th century. Many large public buildings, such as the U.S. Capitol and numerous state capitols, include Roman features.

Roman roads were also technological marvels. The army built a vast network of roads constructed of stone, concrete, and sand that connected Rome to all parts of the empire. Many lasted into the Middle Ages; some are still used.



This is a photo of a Roman aqueduct in modern Spain that has survived. The cross section shows how the water moved within the aqueduct.

Roman System of Law Rome's most lasting and widespread contribution was its law. Early Roman law dealt mostly with the rights of Roman citizens. As the empire grew, however, the Romans came to believe that laws should be fair and apply equally to all people, rich and poor. Slowly, judges began to recognize certain standards of justice. These standards were influenced largely by the teachings of Stoic philosophers and were based on common sense and practical ideas. Some of the most important principles of Roman law were:

- All persons had the right to equal treatment under the law.
- A person was considered innocent until proven guilty.
- The burden of proof rested with the accuser rather than the accused.
- A person should be punished only for actions, not thoughts.
- Any law that seemed unreasonable or grossly unfair could be set aside.

The principles of Roman law endured to form the basis of legal systems in many European countries and of places influenced by Europe, including the United States.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

C. Hypothesizing

How would the world be different if Rome had not existed?

Rome's Enduring Influence By preserving and adding to Greek civilization, Rome strengthened the Western cultural tradition. The world would be a very different place had Rome not existed. Historian R. H. Barrow has stated that Rome never fell because it turned into something even greater—an idea—and achieved immortality.

Around the same time that Rome was developing its enduring culture, different but equally complex empires were growing in India and China, as you will see in Chapter 7.

Section 5 Assessment

1. TERMS & NAMES

Identify

- Greco-Roman culture
- Pompeii
- Virgil
- Tacitus
- aqueduct

2. TAKING NOTES

Using a chart like the one below, list the accomplishments of Roman culture.

Fine Arts	Literature	Engineering	Law

Choose one and write a few paragraphs on its importance.

3. DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

Which principle of law do you think has been Rome's greatest contribution to modern legal systems?

THINK ABOUT

- equality before the law
- innocent until proven guilty
- unfair laws could be set aside

4. ANALYZING THEMES

Power and Authority Why do you think the Greek philosophy of Stoicism was so appealing to Romans?

THINK ABOUT

- Stoic philosophy
- the Roman citizen-soldier
- Roman law