

World History
Objective 2.03
Lesson

Objective 2.03: Lesson:

Describe the developments and achievements of Roman civilization and analyze the significance of the fall of Rome.

As with Greece, geography had a great impact on the development of Roman civilization. The location on a peninsula encouraged the development of trade throughout the western Mediterranean; the location of Rome, eighteen miles inland but on the Tiber River, gave it both access to the sea and protection from pirates. The mountains of Italy were not as formidable as those of Greece and the land around them was more fertile. Unlike Greece, where the cities developed separately into city-states, communication across the Italian peninsula made separate development less likely.

The earliest settlers of Rome were the Latins, but these were joined in large numbers by Greek settlers, especially in southern Italy, and the Etruscans who came from the north. Eventually, the Romans overthrew the Etruscan king and established a republic, where the leader was not a monarch (king) and some citizens had the right to vote.

The Romans political structure consisted of two classes of people: the Patricians, or wealthy landowners, and the Plebians, small farmers, craftspeople and merchants. The Roman Senate came to hold an important position in the government.

One of Rome's chief gifts to the Mediterranean world and later generations was its system of laws. Rome's first code of law was called the Twelve Tables. Later, more sophisticated systems of civil law were developed.

Rome's expansion brought her into conflict with Carthage, a civilization located on the north African coast in what is now the country of Tunisia. After Rome defeated Carthage, they became the major power in the Mediterranean world.

Unrest in Rome led to the end of the republic and two triumvirates (rule by three leaders) occurred. The first triumvirate was led by Julius Caesar, Pompey, and Crassus. Caesar eventually defeated the other two. After Caesar was assassinated, the second triumvirate of Lepidus, Marc Antony, and Octavian took power. Octavian soon defeated the other two and became Rome's first emperor, Augustus Caesar. During his reign, Rome ruled all of the Mediterranean and most of the then known world.

Rome's followed the Greek style of art; in architecture ,Rome used curved forms, the arch, the dome and the vault. They built a network of roads and aqueducts, some of which are still in use today.

After Augustus' reign, Rome seldom reached this same level of peace, both internally and externally. Christianity, which began its development during Augustus' reign, eventually became the dominant religion of the empire, replacing the polytheistic Roman religion that was based on Greek religion. Many of the succeeding emperors were overthrown and often assassinated during their reigns. In the fourth century, the empire separated into two with the eastern empire centered in the city of Constantinople (formerly Byzantium and currently Istanbul). Attacks from various barbarian groups resulted in the end of the Roman Empire in the West by the 5th Century. In the east, the Byzantine Empire lasted until it was defeated by the Ottomans in the 15th century.

1. Compare and contrast the two empires of Greece and Rome in terms of their successes and downfall.
2. Explain what are the principal gifts that Western Society (our society) has received from the Greek and Roman Empires.
3. What caused the Greek Empire to fall? What caused the Roman Empire to fall?
4. How did geography create similarities and differences in the Greek and Roman Empires?