



# Western Civilization from Prehistory to 1650

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## TOPIC 6.2. PAX ROMANA AND THE ROMAN CONTRIBUTION

Supplement to Chambers, *The Western Experience*, Chapter 5: The Empire and Christianity, pp. 137-151, or McKay, *A History of Western Society*, Chapter 6: Pax Romana, pp. 151-177.

<p><b>PAX ROMANA</b> <b>Augustus</b></p>	<p>Octavian founded an EMPIRE that endured for nearly 500 years. Ruling in the guise of Republican government, Octavian, using the title Augustus, REFORMED THE ARMY, FOUGHT CORRUPTION in the provinces, KEPT THE PEACE, and BUILT ROADS and other PUBLIC WORKS. Augustus also EXTENDED THE RULE OF LAW throughout the empire, such that even slaves and women enjoyed legal rights unprecedented in the ancient world. For two hundred years, during the PAX ROMANA, many millions of people in Italy and the Empire's provinces enjoyed peace and prosperity.</p>
<p><b>The Roman Spirit</b></p>	<p>The Romans knew how to preserve, adapt, and disseminate civilization. They were SYNTHESISTS rather than innovators. The Pax Romana could only have been fashioned and maintained by a people grave in nature, mature in judgment, and conscious of their responsibilities to others.</p>
<p><b>ROMAN GOVERNMENT Theory</b></p>	<p>Roman political thinkers contributed many governmental theories: (1) The SOCIAL CONTRACT theory (that government originated as a voluntary agreement among citizens). (2) The idea of POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY (that all power ultimately resides with the people). (3) The concept that LAW must be the basis for government.</p>
<p><b>Structure</b></p>	<p>Also important was the Roman tradition of unity and order within a great imperial structure. The Romans laid the foundations for the POLITICAL FRAMEWORK OF MODERN EUROPE. Many current administrative DIVISIONS, such as the county and province, are derived from Roman practice. In some instances, EUROPEAN BOUNDARIES are little altered from those existing under the Caesars. The MEDIEVAL CHURCH also modeled its organization, administrative units, and much of its law after that of the Empire.</p>
<p><b>ROMAN LAW</b></p>	<p>Of the contributions made by the Romans in government and politics, Roman law is the most important. Roman law is the basis for the LAW CODES of Italy, France, Scotland, and the Latin American countries. Where English common law is used, as in the United States, there is also a heritage of ROMAN LEGAL PRINCIPLES. It strongly affected the development of CANON LAW of the Roman Catholic Church. INTERNATIONAL LAW has borrowed principles inherent in the Roman system.</p> <p>Roman law evolved slowly over a period of about a thousand years. When Rome was a struggling city-state, the law was UNWRITTEN, mixed with religious custom, and harsh in its judgments. In the 5th century B.C., the law was WRITTEN DOWN in the Law of the Twelve Tables. During the remainder of the Republic, the body of Roman Law (<i>jus civile</i> -- the law of the citizen) was ENLARGED by legislation passed by the Senate and the assembly and INTERPRETED by the judiciary to meet new conditions. By the 2nd century A.D., the emperor had become the sole source of law, a responsibility he entrusted to scholars skilled in the law (<i>jurisprudentes</i>). These jurists HUMANIZED AND RATIONALIZED Roman law to meet the needs of a world state. Finally, in the 6th century A.D., Roman law was CODIFIED AND PRESERVED for posterity.</p>
<p><b>ROMAN ENGINEERING &amp; ARCHITECTURE</b></p>	<p>The Empire's needs required a communication system of paved ROADS and BRIDGES as well as huge PUBLIC BUILDINGS and AQUEDUCTS for the cities. As road builders, the Romans surpassed all previous peoples. Roads were constructed in layers of stone according to SOUND ENGINEERING PRINCIPLES. Their roads were planned for the use of armies and messengers and were kept in CONSTANT REPAIR. The APPIAN WAY,</p>

	<p>running from Rome to the Bay of Naples, was built about 300 B.C. to facilitate Rome's expansion southward.</p> <p>In designing their bridges and aqueducts, the Romans placed a series of <b>STONE ARCHES</b> next to one another to provide mutual support. Fourteen <b>AQUEDUCTS</b>, stretching a total of 265 miles, supplied some 50 gallons of water daily for each inhabitant of Rome. The practical nature of the Romans and their skill and initiative in engineering were demonstrated in the many <b>DAMS, RESERVOIRS, and HARBORS</b> they built.</p> <p>The <b>BARREL VAULT</b>, basically a series of adjoining arches forming a structure resembling a tunnel, was a new method of enclosing space. In the barrel vault the supports of the arches became heavy masonry walls to bear the weight of the vaulted roof. The Romans next developed the <b>CROSS VALUT</b> by intersection two barrel vaults at right angles.</p> <p>Another important advance in architecture was the Roman's success in constructing <b>CONCRETE DOMES</b> on a large scale. The weight of the dome was transferred directly to the walls and no other support was necessary. The largest of the dome structures was the <b>PANTHEON</b> (temple of all the gods).</p> <p>The standard type of Roman public building was the <b>BASCILICA</b>, a colonnaded structure that became a model for early Christian churches. Rows of columns divided the interior into a central nave and side aisles, with the roof over the nave raised to admit light, creating a <b>CLERESTORY</b> (an upper portion of a wall containing windows for supplying natural light to a building. The most famous Roman edifice is the <b>COLOSSEUM</b>, a hug amphitheater about one quarter of a mile around on the outside and with a seating capacity of about 45,000.</p>
<p><b>THE ARTS</b></p>	<p>The Romans developed a distinctive <b>SCULPTURE</b> which was realistic, secular, and individualistic. <b>EQUESTRIAN STATUES</b> sculpted coffins (<b>SARCOPHAGI</b>), and the <b>RELIEFS</b> found on imperial monuments were exceptionally fine works of art. The Romans were particularly skilled in producing floor <b>MOSAICS</b> and in painting <b>FRESCOES</b>. Roman epic, dramatic, and lyric <b>POETRY</b> forms were usually written in conscious imitation of Greek masterpieces.</p>
<p><b>LITERATURE</b></p>	<p>Latin literature was less creative than Greek. But it remains part of the world's great literatures because of its influences upon medieval, renaissance, and modern times.</p>
<p><b>Cicero</b></p> <p><b>Virgil</b></p>	<p><b>CICERO</b> (106-43 B.C.) was the greatest master of Latin <b>PROSE</b> and the outstanding intellectual influence in Roman history. Acclaimed as the greatest orator of his day, he wrote extensively on philosophy, political theory, and rhetoric. <b>VIRGIL</b> (70-10 B.C.) was the greatest of all Roman poets. His masterpiece, a national epic called the <b>AENEID</b>, asserts Rome's destiny to conquer and rule the world.</p> <p><b>LIVY</b> (99 B.C.-17 A.D.), a contemporary of Virgil, wrote a <b>HISTORY OF ROME</b>, a work of epic proportions which glories Rome's conquests and ancestral ways. He glorified the virtues of the ancient Romans -- their heroism, patriotism, and piety -- and sought to draw moral lessons from an idealized past. <b>TACITUS</b> (55-117 A.D.) was concerned with improving society, and used history to serve his ends. In his <b>GERMANIA</b>, Tacitus contrasted the life of the idealized, simple Germanic tribes with the corrupt and immoral existence of the Roman upper classes. In the <b>ANNALS</b> and <b>HISTORIES</b>, he depicted the shortcomings of the emperors and their courts.</p>
<p><b>PHILOSOPHY</b></p> <p><b>Epicurianism</b></p>	<p>The Romans contributed <b>NO ORIGINAL PHILOSOPHICAL THEORIES</b>, preferring to adapt existing Greek systems of thought to suit their needs. However, they were attracted to two Hellenistic ethical philosophies (Epicureanism and Stoicism) because of the corruption of the late Republic.</p> <p><b>EPICURIANSIM</b> made its greatest impact during the last days of the Republic, since men</p>

<p><b>Stoicism</b></p>	<p>found its tenets comforting in a period of political upheaval when no one knew what the morrow would bring. The Epicureans taught that the wise man could achieve happiness simply by freeing his body from pain and his mind from fear -- particularly the fear of death. To reach this goal, men must AVOID BODILY EXCESSES, including those of pleasure, and accept the scientific teaching of Democritus that both body and soul are composed of atoms which fall apart at death. Thus, BEYOND DEATH THERE IS NO EXISTENCE and nothing to fear.</p> <p>STOICISM appealed to the Roman ruling classes. The Stoics argued that THE UNIVERSE IS CONTROLLED by some power -- variously called Reason, World Soul, Fortune, and God -- which determines everything that happens. The wise man conforms his will to the World Will and "STOICALLY" ACCEPTS whatever part fortune allots him in the drama of life. Stoicism had a humanizing effect on Roman law by introducing such concepts as the LAW OF NATURE, the LAW OF BROTHERHOOD OF MEN (including slaves), and the view that a man is INNOCENT UNTIL PROVED GUILTY. The main emphasis of Roman Stoicism was on a just life, constancy to duty, courage in adversity, and service to humanity.</p> <p>Adapted from <a href="#">The Western Heritage</a> by Donald Kagan et al.</p>
<p><b>ONLINE RESOURCES</b></p>	<p>For more information on Roman culture, explore one or more of the following online resources:</p> <p><a href="#">Exploring Ancient World Cultures (Rome)</a>: Some important primary sources, including Virgil's <i>Aeneid</i>, Paul's "Letter to the Romans", and Marcus Aurelius's <i>Meditations</i>.</p> <p><a href="#">How Excessive Government Killed Ancient Rome</a>: Makes the case that Rome fell because of economic deterioration resulting from excessive taxation, inflation, and over-regulation.</p> <p><a href="#">The Twelve Tables</a>: Primary source.</p> <p><a href="#">Medieval Sourcebook: Corpus Iuris Civilis: The Digest and Codex:Marriage Laws</a>: Laws which address the subject of marriage. Primary sources.</p> <p><a href="#">Roman Engineering and Architecture</a>: Pictures and descriptions of Roman aqueducts, baths, roads, public buildings, temples, catacombs, and other achievements.</p> <p><a href="#">Ancient Roman Philosophy</a>: Relates Stoicism to manliness (strength, toughness, simplicity, and bearing up under adversity).</p>
<p><b>DISCUSSION QUESTIONS</b></p>	<p>Drawing on the resources you have had an opportunity to explore (textbook, course documents, online resources, library resources), answer one or more of the following questions:</p> <p><b>The Roman Republic had a constitution that resembled that of a Greek city-state in many ways, but it collapsed and gave way to one-man rule. How might Roman statesmen and the Senate have preserved the republican constitution?</b></p> <p><b>What was the Pax Romana? What policies and practices enabled it to flourish? How did women and slaves fare during this period?</b></p> <p><b>The Romans borrowed and modified many techniques and practices from the Greeks and others. What values do you suppose the Romans held that allowed them to borrow so heavily?</b></p> <p><b>In what ways have Roman law and the Latin language had lasting effects?</b></p>

	<p><b>What assumptions do you think people who design buildings, write plays, or sculpt statues today in the styles of ancient Greece might hold?</b></p> <p><b>How did Roman architecture reflect the values and social conditions of the Republic and/or Empire?</b></p> <p><b>Which philosophy do you think would have more appeal in the United States today -- the Epicurean or the Stoic? Why?</b></p>
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