

Geography and the Early Development of Rome

How did the Etruscans and Greeks influence the development of Rome?

Introduction

The Roman civilization flourished from about 700 B.C.E. to about 476 C.E. It began in the ancient city of Rome.

Rome is located in Italy, which includes a peninsula and islands in southern Europe. The Italian peninsula is shaped a lot like a boot and reaches into the Mediterranean Sea with its toe pointed toward the island of Sicily.

The Romans have a myth about the founding of their city. Long ago, the story explains, a princess gave birth to twin sons, Romulus and Remus. The boys' father was Mars, the Roman god of war. The princess's uncle—the king—was afraid the boys would grow up to take his throne, so he ordered his men to drown them in the Tiber (TIE-bur) River. However, before the twins drowned, a wolf rescued them.

When Romulus and Remus grew up, they decided to construct a town on the banks of the Tiber River where the wolf had found and saved them. However, in a quarrel over who would rule the new settlement, Romulus killed his brother. He became king of the city, which he named Rome.

The tale of Romulus and Remus is a colorful myth, but in this lesson you will learn about the real founding of Rome. You will learn how Rome's location on the Italian Peninsula brought it in contact with two neighboring groups. Interaction with these groups, the Etruscans and the Greeks, influenced Roman culture in the fields of engineering, sports, architecture, writing, art, and religion.



Social Studies Vocabulary

cuniculus

Etruscan

gladiator

Greco-Roman

Rome

1. Early Romans and Their Neighbors

Over the years, many have attempted to discover the truth about the founding of **Rome**. Although no one really knows who the first king of Rome was, historians do know that the first people to live in the area that became Rome were the Latins. The Latins were one of several groups who had invaded Italy sometime before 1000 B.C.E.

Perhaps around 700 B.C.E., a Latin tribe built the village that eventually became Rome. They constructed their village on the Palatine, a hill in central Italy that overlooks the Tiber River at a location about a dozen miles inland from the sea. Eventually, the village of thatched huts developed into a mighty city that spread over seven hills.

As Rome grew, Roman culture was greatly influenced by two of Rome's neighbors, the **Etruscans** (eh-TRUH-skans) and the Greeks. The Romans borrowed many ideas and skills from these two groups, beginning with the Etruscans.

The Etruscans had come to control Etruria, a land just north of the Palatine, by about 800 B.C.E. It is uncertain where they originally came from. They built some city-states and conquered others. By 600 B.C.E., they ruled much of northern and central Italy, including the town of Rome.

The Greeks also were a major influence on Roman culture. The Romans learned about Greek culture when Greek colonists established towns in southern Italy and on the island of Sicily. Romans also discovered Greek ways from traders and the many Greeks who came to Rome.



2. The Influence of Etruscan Engineering

The Romans became excellent builders because they learned many techniques about engineering, or the science of building, from the Etruscans. Two important Etruscan structures the Romans adapted were the arch and the **cuniculus**.

Etruscan arches rested on two pillars, which supported a half-circle of wedge-shaped stones. A keystone in the center held the other stones of the arch tightly in place.

A cuniculus was a long underground trench connected by vertical shafts to the ground above. Etruscans used these trenches to irrigate land, to drain swamps, and to distribute water to their cities.

The Romans **adapted** both of these structures and, in time, became even better engineers than the Etruscans. They used arches to build huge public works, including bridges, stadiums, and aqueducts to carry water over long distances.



3. The Influence of Etruscan Sporting Events

Romans also adapted two bloody Etruscan sporting events. The first was slave fighting. The Etruscan custom was to stage slave fights during funerals. Two slaves of the dead master fought to the death with swords and small shields. After being congratulated, the winner was executed.

Etruscan spectators also enjoyed watching chariot races. The charioteers, or drivers, were strapped to their chariots. If a chariot overturned, they could be dragged under the chariot's wheels or trampled by the horses. These fierce competitions often resulted in injury or death.

These Etruscan sports gained popularity in Rome. In Roman stadiums, thousands of slaves died fighting as **gladiators**, professionally trained fighters who battled either each other or wild animals. Romans also flocked to see charioteers risk their lives racing four-horse teams.



4. The Influence of Greek Architecture

The Romans borrowed and adapted ideas from the Greeks, as well as the Etruscans. Greek architecture was one important influence on the Romans. The Greeks constructed marble temples as homes for their gods. Temples like the Parthenon had stately columns that added to their beauty.

The Romans used Greek designs in their own public buildings. Eventually, they learned to use concrete to create even larger structures, such as the Pantheon in Rome.

The Romans also used concrete to build huge stadiums like the Colosseum, where gladiators fought. The Circus Maximus, where people watched chariot races, could seat more than 200,000 spectators.

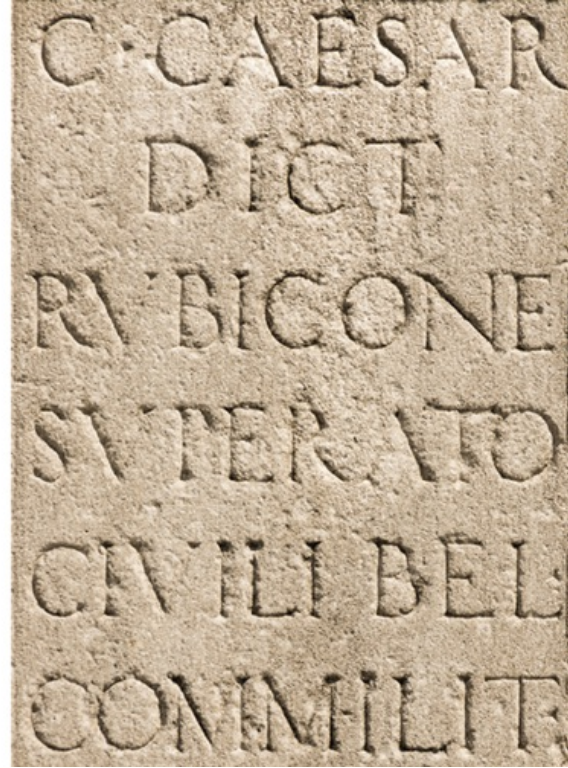
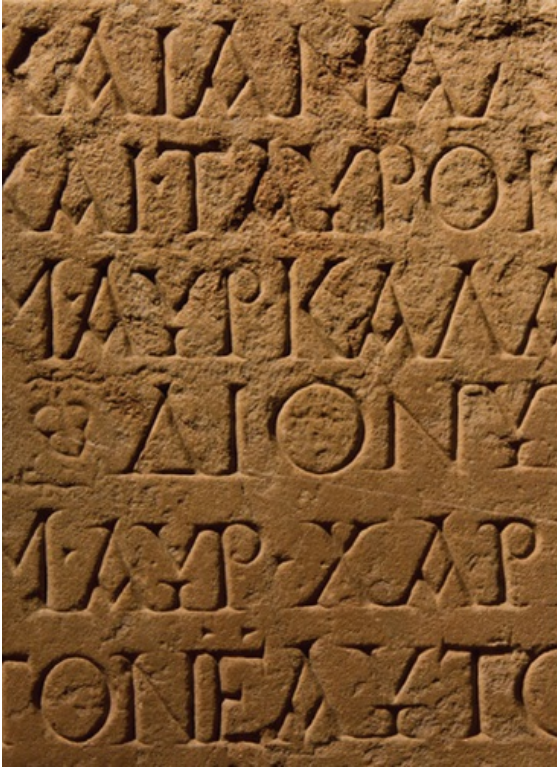


5. The Influence of Greek Writing

Sometimes, the Greek influence on Roman culture was indirect. For example, the Greek alphabet was adopted and then changed by the Etruscans. The Romans then borrowed and altered the Etruscan alphabet.

The Greek and Roman alphabets had many similarities. Like the Greeks, the Romans wrote in all capital letters. The Greeks carved important documents, such as laws and treaties, into bronze or stone plaques, some of which were displayed in the public squares. The Romans also carved inscriptions in walls and columns for all to see.

Many Roman writers were inspired by Greek poetry and myths. The Roman poet Virgil expanded on Greek tales of a long-ago conflict, the Trojan War. Virgil's poem, the *Aeneid*, told how Aeneas (ay-NEE-ahs), a Trojan prince, fled to Italy after the war. According to Virgil, Aeneas was the ancestor of the first Romans.



6. The Influence of Greek Art

Both the Etruscans and the Romans admired Greek pottery, painting, and sculpture. The Romans acquired some Greek ideas from Etruscan art and borrowed others directly from the Greeks.

Greek pottery was valued throughout the Mediterranean world for its usefulness and beauty. Greek potters created large clay vessels for storing food, water, and wine. They often painted black figures on the red clay. Some of their designs showed pictures of gods and heroes, while others illustrated people in their daily lives. The Romans eagerly brought the work of Greek potters into their homes. Roman artists imitated the technique, but developed their own style.

The Greek influence on Roman painting and sculpture was so great that historians speak of “**Greco-Roman** art.” Wealthy Romans often collected Greek art and built monuments in a Greek style. Roman sculptors and painters used Greek art as models for their own work.

Roman artists also created a lively and realistic style of their own. Greek artists often tried to replicate an ideal, or perfect, human being or god. As Rome's power increased, much of Roman art celebrated great leaders and events. Roman sculptors became especially skilled in

creating lifelike portraits such as realistic busts, or statues showing the subject's head and shoulders. They also carved life-sized statues of famous military leaders. The statues often seemed just as powerful as the leaders themselves.



7. The Influence of Greek Religion

The religion of the Romans was a blend of many influences. For example, they followed Etruscan religious rituals in founding their cities. However, it was Greek religion that especially influenced Roman ideas about the gods.

The Greeks worshipped a number of gods and goddesses who governed every part of Greek life. The Greeks performed rituals and sacrifices to gain the gods' favor for everything from a good harvest to curing the sick.

The early Romans had their own gods and rituals, but their ideas about the gods evolved as they interacted with other cultures. When the Romans encountered a similar god from another culture, they blended that god's characteristics with those of their own.

The Romans adapted many of the Greek gods as their own, but they gave them Roman names. The mightiest Greek god, Zeus, became Jupiter. Aphrodite, the goddess of love, became Venus. Aries, the god of war, became Mars.

The Romans were much less interested in telling stories about the gods

than were the Greeks. Romans were more concerned with performing exactly the right ritual for a particular occasion.



Lesson Summary

In this lesson, you learned about the beginnings of ancient Rome and the Roman civilization. Rome was founded by people called the Latins who settled near the Tiber River on the Italian peninsula.

The Early Romans and Their Neighbors Eventually, the Romans borrowed many ideas and skills from their neighbors. Two groups who significantly influenced Roman culture were the Etruscans and the Greeks.

The Influence of Etruscan Engineering Romans learned a great deal about engineering from the Etruscans. Etruscan ideas included the arch and the cuniculus.

The Influence of Etruscan Sporting Events The Romans also

adapted some Etruscan sporting events. Most popular were chariot racing and slave fighting, which later became gladiator contests in Rome.

The Influence of Greek Architecture and Writing Greek civilization had a huge influence on Roman culture. The Romans used Greek temple designs in their own buildings. They used Greek-style capital letters in their writing, and many Roman poets were inspired by Greek poetry and stories.

The Influence of Greek Art and Religion The Romans greatly admired Greek art. The blend of Greek and Roman styles became known as “Greco-Roman” art. The Romans also made many Greek gods and goddesses their own, although they were more interested in rituals than in stories.

