

## ROMAN CIVILIZATION:

### How did Rome get its name?

Rome is now the *capital city* of Italy. 2,000 years ago it was the centre of the Roman *Empire*. Building started in 753 BC. The Romans had a story to explain how Rome began. Twin boys, Romulus and Remus, were the sons of Mars (the Roman god of war). An evil uncle took them as babies from their mother and threw them into the River Tiber to drown. The babies floated to land, and a mother wolf fed and cared for them. Later a herdsman looked after the twins until they grew up.

Years later, Mars told his twin sons to build a city where they had been found. The city was Rome. One day, Remus made fun of the wall Romulus had built around the city. The twins argued, fought, and Romulus killed Remus. Today, historians and archaeologists agree that people were living in Rome long before 753 BC, but the *legend* is one of the most famous in world history.

### How was Rome ruled?

The people of Rome were farmers and herders. For a time, they were under the control of their neighbours, the Etruscans. Rome became a rich city, ruled by kings. In 509 BC, the Romans drove out their last king, Tarquin the Proud. Rome then became a *republic*.

The republic was ruled by a *Senate*. Rich men, called *senators*, ran the government. Poor men (called plebeians) had much less power. The plebeians fought for fairer treatment. A plebeian, who was a free man (someone who was not a *slave*), could be a Roman *citizen*. People in lands conquered by the Romans could become citizens too. Women and slaves though, could not be citizens - so they could not vote in *elections*.

The Senate could not always control the Roman army. Army *generals* some times fought one another. Rome's best general was Julius Caesar. He lived in the 1st century BC and invaded Britain twice. Caesar came close to being emperor of Rome, but he was murdered in 44 BC. By then, Rome was more than a city. It was the capital of an *empire*. The Romans ruled lands from France to North Africa.

### Who were the Roman emperors?

A Roman emperor was the man who ruled over the *empire*. The first Emperor ruled Rome after years of fighting between rival leaders. His name was Octavian. He took a new name, Augustus, when he became Emperor in 27 BC. Augustus brought peace after years of fighting. Not all the emperors were good and wise. Some were terrible. Some wanted to be gods.

The emperor had a troop of special soldiers to protect him. They were called the Praetorian Guard. However, some of the bad emperors were so unpopular that their Praetorian Guards killed them

### Who was in the Roman army?

Only men could be in the Roman Army. No women. Every Roman soldier was a Roman citizen. He had to be at least 20 years old. He was not supposed to get married while he was a soldier. Most soldiers in the Roman *Empire* came from countries outside Italy. There were Roman soldiers from Africa, France, Germany, the Balkans, Spain and the Middle East.

Soldiers had to stay in the army for at least 25 years! Then they could retire, with a *pension* or a gift of land to farm. Old soldiers often settled down to old age together, in a military town or *colonia*.

### **What was a legion?**

There were about 30 legions in the Roman army. Each legion had between 4,000 and 6,000 soldiers, called legionaries. Each legion had ten cohorts. Each cohort was made up of six troops of about 80 legionaries, called centuries. Each century was led by a *centurion*. A centurion carried a short rod, to show his importance. He could also use his stick to beat any soldier who disobeyed an order. The officer commanding the whole legion was called a *legate*.

### **What did gladiators do?**

Gladiators fought one another, usually in pairs. They also fought wild animals such as lions or bears. When a gladiator was beaten (but still alive), the audience would wave scarves or put their thumbs out if they wanted him killed. If he'd fought well, and they wanted him to live, they would close their thumbs onto their fingers. Different types of gladiators used different weapons. For example, a man with a sword and shield might fight a man with a three-pronged spear or trident, and a big net.

### **What was a Roman play like?**

Romans enjoyed the theatre. Most plays were funny comedies, though there were serious tragedies as well. Actors often wore masks to show whether their character was happy or sad! They also wore wigs - an old man had a white wig, a slave had a red wig.

### **Why did Romans like baths so much?**

Roman baths were like leisure centres. You went there to relax, not just to get clean. The baths were open to everyone, and a good place to keep fit, meet people and do business.

When you went to the baths, you took off your outdoor clothes and warmed up with some exercises. Then, after a swim in the pool, you went into a series of heated rooms. You got hotter and hotter, to sweat out the dirt. You'd chat with friends while you sweated, and perhaps have a massage and rub down with perfumed oil. Then you (or a slave) would scrape off the dirt, sweat and oil with a metal scraper called a *strigil*. Finally, a plunge into a cold pool. Very refreshing! The best preserved Roman baths in Britain are in the city of Bath.

### **How did the Romans change the way we speak and write?**

The Romans wrote their history, their literature and their laws. Before the Romans conquered Britain, very few people in Britain could read or write. Stories and knowledge were passed on by word of mouth. From Roman times onwards, people in Britain wrote things down. Educated people wrote in Latin, but later wrote books in their own languages, English and Welsh, for example. The English and Welsh languages changed because of the Romans. Many words in English and Welsh have links to Latin. 'Pedestrian' is one. See if you can find some more....

### **What was life like for a Roman family?**

Life for women in Roman times was often hard. Mother was less important than father in the family. Father had the power of life or death over everyone. When a new baby was born it would be laid at its father's feet - if the father picked the baby up it would live, but if he ignored the baby it would be taken away to die. Women were expected to run the home, cook meals, and raise children. If they were

wealthy, women were lucky; they had *slaves* to do the work.

Many girls were married at the age of 14. Marriages were often arranged between families. A man could divorce his wife if she did not give birth to a son. Many women died young (in their 30s), because childbirth could be dangerous, and diseases were common.

### **Did Romans go to school?**

Most children in Roman times did not go to school. Only quite rich families could afford to pay a teacher. Most schools were in towns. Not many girls went to school, but some were taught at home by *tutors*, who were often educated *slaves*. Boys from rich families learned history, maths, and literature at school, to prepare them for jobs in the army or government. In poor families, girls and boys had to work, helping their parents.

## **RELIGION**

### **What kind of gods did Romans worship?**

At first, Romans believed in many different gods and goddesses. These gods were like people, but with magical powers. The Roman gods were part of a family. People told stories or *myths* about them. Each god or goddess looked after different people or things.

These are a few of the old Roman gods:

**Saturn:** once king of the gods, his place was taken by his son (Jupiter). Saturn was the god of seed-sowing. A merry Roman holiday or festival, the Saturnalia, was named after him.

**Jupiter:** god of the sky, he was the most important god.

**Juno:** Jupiter's wife, she looked after women.

**Neptune:** Jupiter's brother, he was the god of the sea.

**Minerva:** goddess of wisdom and women's work, such as weaving cloth.

**Mars:** god of war, though originally god of farming.

**Venus:** goddess of love, she was the lover of Mars.

### **Why did the Romans borrow new gods?**

The Romans often borrowed new gods from people they conquered. They hoped these new gods would make them stronger. They borrowed gods from Egypt, for example, such as the goddess Isis. Roman soldiers worshipped Mithras, a god from Iran. A soldier going on a journey might ask Mercury (god of travel) for help, as well as Mithras the soldiers' god and he might also make a sacrifice to Neptune (the sea god) if he had to travel by ship!

### **What went on a Roman temple?**

People worshipped the gods in special buildings called temples. Inside the temple was a statue of a god. Priests looked after the temple. People went there to make sacrifices or offerings of food, flowers or money. Sometimes the priest killed an animal, such as a bull, as part of the sacrifice ceremony. Some Emperors said they were gods too, so everyone had to make a sacrifice to the Emperor.

Romans also had gods at home. They believed in household spirits that protected the family. They had miniature temples, or shrines, in their homes. The family would make offerings of food and drink to the household gods, and pray for good luck and protection.

**Did Romans believe in life after death?**

The Romans believed that a person's spirit went to the *underworld* after the person died. To get there, the dead needed to cross the River Styx. The dead person's family would leave a coin on the dead body, to pay the ferryman, whose name was Charon.

Some of these old beliefs changed when Christianity was made the official religion of the Roman Empire by the Emperor Constantine in the 4th century AD. Before then, Christians got into trouble because they refused to worship the emperor as a god. Some Christians were arrested and put to death.

**Proposed Terminology:**

**Herdsmen:** keeper of a group of animal

**Archaeologists:** Archaeology: study of ancient things, esp. remains of prehistoric times, eg tombs, buried cities

**Republic:** system of government in which the elected representatives of the people are supreme

**Legion:** division of several thousand men in the armies of ancient Rome

**Cohort:** tenth part of a legion

Troop: 80 to 100 soldiers

**Rod:** thin, straight piece of wood or metal

**Wig:** head covering of false hair

**Seed sowing:** putting or planting seeds on the ground

**Miniature:** very small, tiny

**Ferryman:** man using and sailing with boats

**Possible questions:**

-What are features or characteristics of the Roman Civilization?

-How Romans copied the Greek world?

-How could describe the creation of the Roman first city?

-How Roman army was one of the greatest and powerful armies in the history of the world?



THE ROMAN EMPIRE