

Eyewitness Ancient Rome

Did you know?

FASCINATING FACTS

1. Romans washed their dishes by rubbing them with sand, then rinsing them in clean water.

2. The Romans believed that the goddess of chance, named Fortuna, controlled their lives. Because she was permanently blindfolded, her decisions were made at random.

3. After the birth of Christianity, the events at the Colosseum declined in popularity, and large sections of the building were removed to provide construction materials for other projects. This was still happening in the Middle Ages.

4. When Mount Vesuvius erupted in 79 AD, it buried the seaside town of Pompeii under 40 ft (12 m) of ash and debris.

5. One emperor, the insane Caligula (37-41 AD), tried to have his horse appointed as a senator.

6. When Mount Vesuvius erupted in 79 AD, it buried the seaside town of Pompeii under 40 ft (12 m) of ash and debris.

7. If rebel Roman slaves were caught, they were crucified—nailed to a cross until they died. In a month led by Spartacus in 73 BC, 4,000 slaves were crucified.

8. In a Roman household, the father had absolute power; he could even condemn his wife, his children, and any of their slaves to death if he felt they deserved it.

9. In addition to military training, legions in the Roman army were given instruction in surveying, engineering, and building, so they could construct camps, forts, and defense walls.

10. Roman culture and civilization owed a great deal to that of ancient Greece. The Romans worshiped many of the same gods as the Greeks; they developed their alphabet from the Greek one, and much more.

11. Many of the works of Roman writers and philosophers are still widely read today. If it were not for the works of medical monks who painstakingly copied and illustrated them, however, many of these texts would have been lost forever.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q How do we know so much about ancient Rome?

A Experts have learned a great deal from seeing Roman buildings and artifacts. Information about politics, history, religion, and culture comes largely from Roman documents, Roman mosaics, and paintings showing us clearly what people and everyday objects looked like.

Q How different were Roman homes from modern ones?

A Roman houses contained less furniture than modern homes, but had more decoration on the walls and floors, in the form of mosaics and wall paintings. Far less primitive than you might imagine, the homes of the rich had running water, flushing toilets, and central heating.

Q Did the ancient Romans eat the same foods that we eat?

A Many of the things they ate and drank would be familiar to us today, but some were different. For example, they ate bread, for example, eggs, fruit (such as apples, pears, figs, dates, plums, and grapes), vegetables (leaves, carrots, cabbage, beans, and asparagus), and wine (usually diluted with water). The Romans ate less meat than we do, but lamb and pork were popular. Fish, along with exotic birds like cranes, parrots, flamingos, and peacocks, provided special-occasion treats for the very wealthy.

Q What was life like for women in ancient Rome?

A Most Roman women were poorly educated. They could not vote or hold office, and few occupations were open to them. A woman's status depended on her husband, but she could also exert power through her sons. Livy, for example, the wife of Emperor Augustus, had no official role, yet it was widely accepted that she ruled alongside him.

Record Breakers

ARCHITECTURAL TRAMPY The Pantheon temple in Rome, completed in 126 AD, has a huge dome that was the largest in existence until the 19th century. The Pantheon still stands today.

READ AND A COME The first living Roman to appear on a coin was Julius Caesar.

TARIFFING METROPOLIS Rome was the largest city in the Empire, with a population of more than 1,000,000 in AD.

RETAIL HEAVEN The first-ever shopping mall was built by Emperor Trajan in Rome. Arranged over several levels, it contained more than 150 shopping outlets.

ROADS TO ROME The Via Appia was the first road in a sophisticated network that eventually covered 45,000 miles (75,000 km) and connected Rome with all the important towns of the Empire.

SALLOPING INFLATION In the 3rd century AD, prices in the Empire spiraled out of control. Between 200-280 CE, the cost of a bushel of wheat in Egypt rose from 16 to 120,000 sesterces.

DETAILED HISTORY The scholar Titus Livius (71 BC) wrote a history of Rome that filled 142 books, 25 of which have survived. His works were used as textbooks in Roman schools.

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