**Roman Empire facts for kids**

[Kids Encyclopedia Facts](https://kids.kiddle.co/)



Greatest size of the Roman Empire, in about 117 [AD](https://kids.kiddle.co/AD)



The Roman Empire at different times.

The **Roman Empire** ([Latin](https://kids.kiddle.co/Latin_language): *imperium romanum*) was the largest [empire](https://kids.kiddle.co/Empire) of the ancient world. Its capital was [Rome](https://kids.kiddle.co/Rome), and its empire was based on the [Mediterranean](https://kids.kiddle.co/Mediterranean). The Empire dates from 27 BC, when [Octavian](https://kids.kiddle.co/Octavian) became the Emperor, Augustus.

The empire was the third stage of [Ancient Rome](https://kids.kiddle.co/Ancient_Rome). [Rome](https://kids.kiddle.co/Rome) was first ruled by [Roman kings](https://kids.kiddle.co/Roman_Kingdom), then by the [Roman Republic](https://kids.kiddle.co/Roman_Republic), then by an emperor.

Many modern lands were once part of the Roman Empire, including [Britain](https://kids.kiddle.co/Roman_Britain) (not [Scotland](https://kids.kiddle.co/Scotland)), [Spain](https://kids.kiddle.co/Spain), [Portugal](https://kids.kiddle.co/Portugal), [France](https://kids.kiddle.co/Gaul), [Italy](https://kids.kiddle.co/Italy), [Greece](https://kids.kiddle.co/Greece), [Turkey](https://kids.kiddle.co/Turkey), [Germany](https://kids.kiddle.co/Germany), [Egypt](https://kids.kiddle.co/Egypt), and the north coast of [Africa](https://kids.kiddle.co/Africa). The main language of the Roman Empire was [Latin](https://kids.kiddle.co/Latin); [Greek](https://kids.kiddle.co/Ancient_Greek_language) was an important secondary language.

The western part of the Roman Empire continued for about 500 years, and the eastern part, including [Greece](https://kids.kiddle.co/Greece) and [Anatolia](https://kids.kiddle.co/Anatolia), continued for about a thousand years more. The eastern part was called the [Byzantine Empire](https://kids.kiddle.co/Byzantine_Empire) with a capital at [Constantinople](https://kids.kiddle.co/Constantinople).

**Governing the Empire**

In order to control their large empire, the Romans developed important ideas about [law](https://kids.kiddle.co/Law) and [government](https://kids.kiddle.co/Government). They developed the best army in the world at that time, and ruled by force. They had fine [engineering](https://kids.kiddle.co/Engineering), and built roads, cities, and outstanding buildings. The Empire was divided into [provinces](https://kids.kiddle.co/Province), each with a governor plus [civil](https://kids.kiddle.co/) and [military](https://kids.kiddle.co/Military) support. [Letters](https://kids.kiddle.co/Letter), both official and private, would constantly go to and from Rome.

[Trade](https://kids.kiddle.co/Trade) was most important for Rome, a city of more than a million people, by far the largest city in the world. They needed, and got, [wheat](https://kids.kiddle.co/Wheat) from Egypt, [tin](https://kids.kiddle.co/Tin) from Britannia, [grapes](https://kids.kiddle.co/Grape) from [Gaul](https://kids.kiddle.co/Gaul), and so on. In return, the Romans built provincial capitals into fine cities, protected them from raids by [barbarians](https://kids.kiddle.co/Barbarian), and provided education and career opportunities for young people in the provinces, such as careers in the [Roman army](https://kids.kiddle.co/Roman_army).

In principle, emperors had absolute control, and could do as they pleased. In practice, they faced many difficult problems. They had a staff of what we call '[civil servants](https://kids.kiddle.co/Civil_service)' and the advice of the [Roman Senate](https://kids.kiddle.co/Roman_Senate). The emperor had to decide what were the most important issues facing the Empire, and what should be done about them. Most of them tried to do two sorts of thing. One was to do things to improve the life of Romans in peacetime. The other was to fight and defeat Rome's enemies. A wealthy empire always has enemies.

With kings and emperors, a big problem is the [order of succession](https://kids.kiddle.co/Order_of_succession). Who follows them when they die? Kings were sometimes followed by their eldest son, if he was capable of ruling. For Roman emperors, more often it would be an [adopted](https://kids.kiddle.co/Adoption) son. It worked like this. The emperor would notice an outstanding young man from one of the best families. He would adopt him as his son. Before he died he would make clear whom he thought should succeed him, by making him a [Roman consul](https://kids.kiddle.co/Roman_consul), or by stating in his [will](https://kids.kiddle.co/Will_%28law%29) that the younger man should succeed him. Sometimes this worked; sometimes it did not. Every now and then there would be a [civil war](https://kids.kiddle.co/Civil_war) between claimants to the throne.

An adopted son or two gave the emperor more choices. Some emperors had no son; some had sons who were killed in battle, or died during a plague. Later on, emperors grew so weak that the [Roman army](https://kids.kiddle.co/Roman_army) would just pick one of their [generals](https://kids.kiddle.co/General_officer) to be the next emperor. This often led to [civil war](https://kids.kiddle.co/Civil_war). The life stories of the emperors can be found in [List of Roman emperors](https://kids.kiddle.co/List_of_Roman_emperors).

The Romans fought many wars against other countries, and enjoyed watching violent [sports](https://kids.kiddle.co/Sports). They enjoyed watching races between [chariots](https://kids.kiddle.co/Chariot) pulled by [horses](https://kids.kiddle.co/Horse), and fights between men using [weapons](https://kids.kiddle.co/Weapon) ([gladiators](https://kids.kiddle.co/Gladiator)). Unlike in modern [sports](https://kids.kiddle.co/Sport), the fighters were often killed in these fights. Romans enjoyed these shows in the [Colosseum](https://kids.kiddle.co/Colosseum).

The Romans had great [civil engineering](https://kids.kiddle.co/Civil_engineering). They built many large public buildings and [villas](https://kids.kiddle.co/), [aqueducts](https://kids.kiddle.co/Aqueduct) to carry [water](https://kids.kiddle.co/Water), and good [stone](https://kids.kiddle.co/Stone) [bridges](https://kids.kiddle.co/Bridge) and [roads](https://kids.kiddle.co/Road). Some of these things can still be seen today. Many famous [writers](https://kids.kiddle.co/Writer) were Romans, including [Cicero](https://kids.kiddle.co/Cicero%22%20%5Co%20%22Cicero)and [Virgil](https://kids.kiddle.co/Virgil).

The [New Testament](https://kids.kiddle.co/New_Testament) of the [Bible](https://kids.kiddle.co/Bible) tells about the Romans in the life of [Jesus Christ](https://kids.kiddle.co/Jesus_Christ). During Jesus' life, the Romans, who were [pagans](https://kids.kiddle.co/Pagan), ruled his country. Later, several emperors tried to [destroy Christianity](https://kids.kiddle.co/History_of_Christianity#Persecutions) but they did not succeed. By 312 AD the emperor [Galerius](https://kids.kiddle.co/Galerius) allowed people freedom to follow [Christianity](https://kids.kiddle.co/Christianity), and the next year, a [general](https://kids.kiddle.co/General_officer), [Constantine](https://kids.kiddle.co/Constantine_I_%28Rome%29), became emperor and converted to Christianity.

The [city](https://kids.kiddle.co/City) of [Rome](https://kids.kiddle.co/Rome) was taken over several times by [barbarians](https://kids.kiddle.co/Barbarian), notably in 410 AD when the [Goths](https://kids.kiddle.co/Goth) sacked the city (looting). The last Western Roman emperor, [Romulus Augustus](https://kids.kiddle.co/Romulus_Augustus), resigned in 476 AD. The Roman Empire would last another 1,000 years as the [Byzantine Empire](https://kids.kiddle.co/Byzantine_Empire) in the east.

The main [coin](https://kids.kiddle.co/Coin) of the Roman Empire was the [denarius](https://kids.kiddle.co/Denarius).