

ROMAN ARCHITECTURE

The surviving architecture in Rome today is testimony to its grandeur in the days when it was the capital of the Roman Empire. Rome, located on the Tiber River and surrounded by seven hills that provide a naturally protected site, controlled the whole Mediterranean world for many centuries.

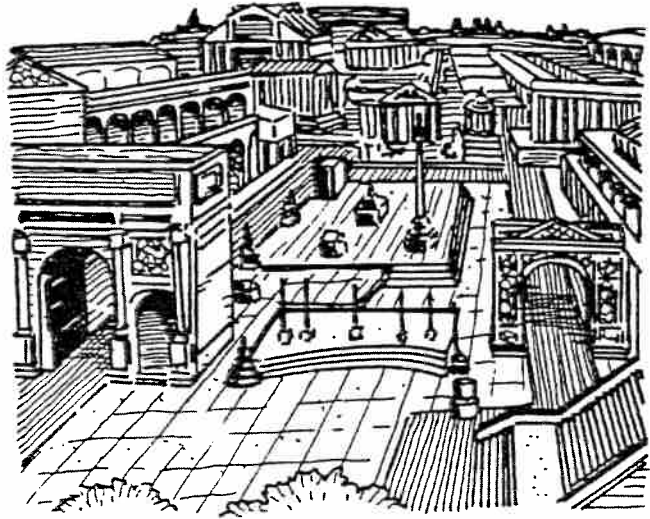
The buildings that embellished Rome at the peak of its power during the Imperial period were numerous and impressive. These included theaters, baths, temples, libraries, imperial palaces, basilicas or public meeting places, fora (plural of forum) or commercial and social centers of the city, and arenas for public events. Public monuments commemorating the achievements of emperors, such as triumphal arches and columns, were also erected. Bridges, aqueducts (artificial channeling systems for conducting water to the city), and a strong defensive wall with access gates completed the array of public structures that once adorned the city of Rome. These types of monuments and structures could be found in any Roman city throughout the empire.

The nucleus of a Roman city was the *forum*, an area of open space that served as the commercial and social center where people met to socialize and businesses sold their goods. Lawcourts were also located there. A forum consisted of a central, open, rectangular space surrounded by basilicas, which were long, open structures supported by columns, and a temple. The greatest and oldest forum in the Roman world was the Forum Romanum, the chief marketplace of Rome. It was unusual in that it was not built in one phase, but grew in size through the years. It was filled with basilicas, temples, the Senate House, and the triumphal arch of Septimius Severus.

The Romans adopted several architectural features from the Etruscans and the Greeks. They adopted the form of the arch from the Etruscans. From the Greeks, they used the classical orders of the Greek temple, most commonly the Corinthian architectural order. The Romans developed and combined these elements with a new type of building material, concrete, to form their own unique architectural style.

During the Late Republic period, the Romans invented a new building material that we still use today. By mixing volcanic dust and lime mortar, they produced a cement that hardened into concrete. The Romans used it as the core for the walls of buildings. Because concrete was unattractive to the eye, they faced it with marble slabs or baked clay bricks. The many surviving Roman monuments throughout western Europe testify to the strength and durability of concrete.

The Romans made great use of the Etruscan arch. The Etruscans used it as a single stone structure to build gateways in their fortification walls. But the Romans used the arch in various ways, and in combination with the use of concrete, created architectural



The forum was the chief marketplace of Rome. It also contained temples, basilicas, the Senate House, and public monuments to the emperors.

structures of great size and strength. They created the *vault* by putting a series of arches side by side. A *dome* was created by several arches crossing in different directions in a circular space that intersected in the center. The use of arches and concrete revolutionized Roman architecture. New ways of exploiting the interior space of buildings were developed, thus creating monuments of great size and complexity.

There are many examples of these arch structures in Rome and the provinces. The most simple use of the arch can be seen in the construction of city gates, bridges, and aqueducts. Bridges consisted of a series of arches joined in a line and were built across valleys and rivers. Many are still in use today. An aqueduct consisted of one to three levels of joining arches through which water was channeled into a city. Vaulted arches were used in the construction of triumphal arches commemorating the achievements of the Roman emperors. The walls were carved with sculpted reliefs of the emperors' triumphs, sacrifices, and battles. Corinthian columns also decorated the outside of the archways.

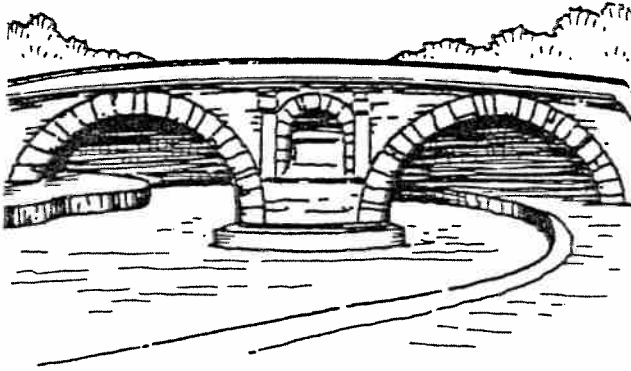
Arches and Greek columns were also used in the construction of theaters and amphitheaters (round theaters). The most famous example of such a monument was the Colosseum in Rome. Arches were used throughout the building to support the different levels of the seating area. The outer facade consisted of three stories of arches, decorated with Greek columns in between each of the arches. Arches, vaults, and domes were used in the construction of the imperial palaces and public buildings, such as baths, to create vast interior spaces.

The Greek influence in Roman architecture can be seen in the form of columns on the outer facades of the aforementioned monuments, but it can most easily be noticed in the construction of basilicas and temples with the use of Corinthian-style columns. A basilica was a long portico supported by a series of columns. It served as an open-air, public meeting place. A typical Roman temple consisted of a closed structure built on a high platform. The temple structure, in most cases, had a deep, columned porch in the front. Sometimes, it was surrounded entirely by columns, as in a Greek temple.

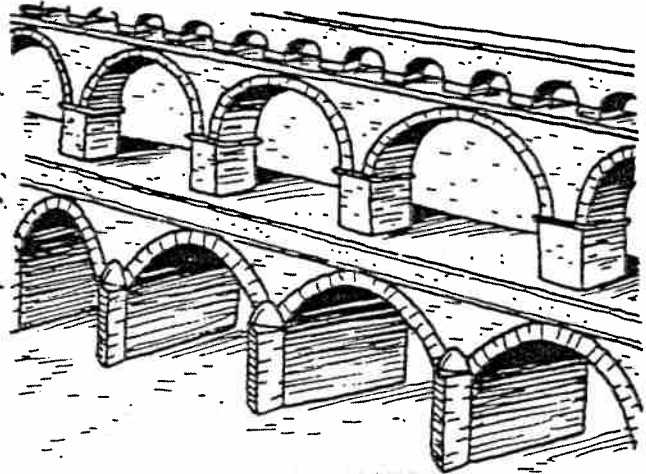
One of the most impressive and fully-preserved examples of the Roman ability to exploit interior space in conjunction with the use of Greek columns was the Pantheon. The Pantheon, built by Hadrian, was a temple dedicated to all gods. The building was made of solid concrete and consisted of a round main room topped by a dome. It was fronted by a porch of Corinthian columns. The interior of the temple was lavishly painted and decorated with gold.

The private dwellings of the Romans were of two types. The common people lived in tightly-packed apartment buildings, much like today. The wealthier Romans built large townhouses, furnished with numerous rooms and a garden. The center of the typical Roman house was the *atrium* or living room, which was surrounded by the other rooms of the house. These included the kitchen, bedrooms, dining room, and store rooms. At the end of the house was a small garden. Because the houses had very few and small windows, the sloping roof of the houses had a hole right above the center of the atrium, called the *compluvium*, where light and air could enter. The rain water would be collected below in a pool, called the *impluvium*, which was the same size as the hole. It was common for two rooms in the front of the house on either side of the main entrance and fronting the street to be used as shops. The Romans decorated their houses with elaborate frescoes depicting scenes of everyday life.

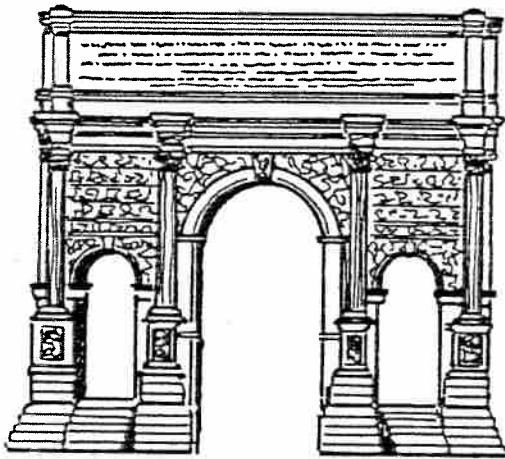
EXAMPLES OF THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE



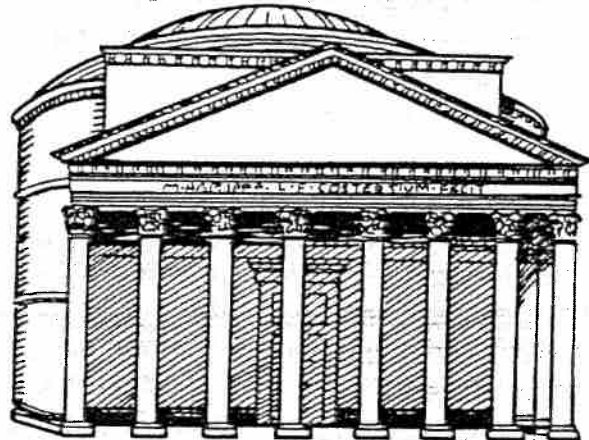
Roman Bridge



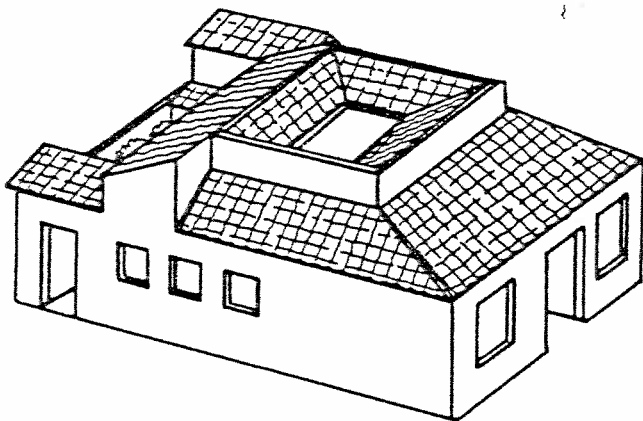
Roman Aqueduct



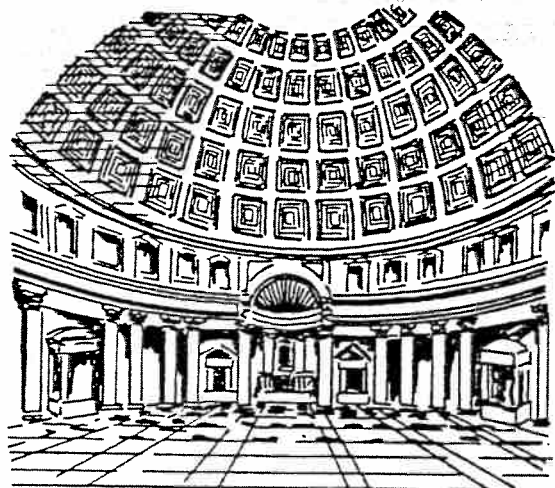
Roman Triumphal Arch



Pantheon Exterior



Roman Townhouse



Pantheon Interior

Name _____ Date _____

POINTS TO PONDER

1. To what extent was Roman architecture influenced by the Etruscan and Greek civilizations?

2. What Roman inventions revolutionized Roman architecture?

3. What kinds of monuments did the Romans build?

4. Describe a typical townhouse owned by a wealthy Roman.

Name _____ Date _____

CHALLENGES

1. What was the forum?

2. What was the function of an aqueduct?

3. Which architectural feature did the Romans adopt from the Etruscans?

4. What is Roman concrete?

5. What is the Pantheon?

6. Which architectural feature did the Romans adopt from the Greeks?

7. What was the central feature of a Roman townhouse?

8. How is a dome built?

9. What is a vault?

10. What was the impluvium?
