

# GODS, GODDESSES AND RELIGION

**A**S with many ancient civilisations, religion played an important role in Roman life. The Romans believed in a number of different gods and goddesses. The Romans **worshipped** them because they believed that the gods and goddesses watched over them and controlled different aspects of their lives. For instance, Neptune was the god of the sea, while Minerva was the goddess of wisdom and women's work.

A MODERN PAINTING OF THE GODDESS MINERVA



THIS IS A STATUE OF NEPTUNE, THE GOD OF THE SEA, WITH HIS FAMOUS TRIDENT.

The Romans were often willing to worship new gods and goddesses. This is because they thought that they would make them stronger. Because they often conquered new places, they would often come across new religions. For example, when the Romans invaded Egypt they started to worship the Egyptian god Isis.



THIS IS THE CAREFULLY CONSTRUCTED CEILING OF THE PANTHEON.



To worship the gods and goddesses, the Romans would often construct temples that were dedicated to a single god or goddess. These were large, impressive buildings. However, Romans would also have small **shrines** in their homes where they could worship the gods and goddesses. The most impressive temple of all was the Pantheon in Rome. It was of such importance because it was a temple that was dedicated to all of the Roman gods and goddesses.

## CHRISTIANITY

Christianity is based around the idea that there is just one, all-powerful God. However, the Romans believed in many powerful gods. Because of this, Christians were punished and often killed by the Romans. However, as the

Roman Empire spread, the amount of Christians in it grew. Eventually, in AD 313, Emperor Constantine allowed Christianity to be practised in the Roman Empire. 10 years later, it became the official religion of the Empire.





## Come to dinner

Dinner with a wealthy Roman meant you ate the best food served on the most stylish plates and bowls. Wealthy Romans ate different food to poorer people.

### Dining with the wealthy

Well-off Romans ate food cooked by their slaves using expensive ingredients from abroad, such as spices, and a popular fish sauce called garum. When a Roman threw a banquet there were lots of courses

designed to impress the guests, such as roast wild boar, swan or piglet. Guests lay on couches at banquets, propping themselves up on one elbow.

A grand Roman kitchen might have looked like this. ▼



### If you were Roman...

Romans flavoured their food with herbs such as rosemary and thyme, never tried in Britain before. They also used herbs as medicine. If you had a headache they would give you mint tea, and if you ate too much and had tummy ache they would give you the herb chamomile.



### Eating with the poor

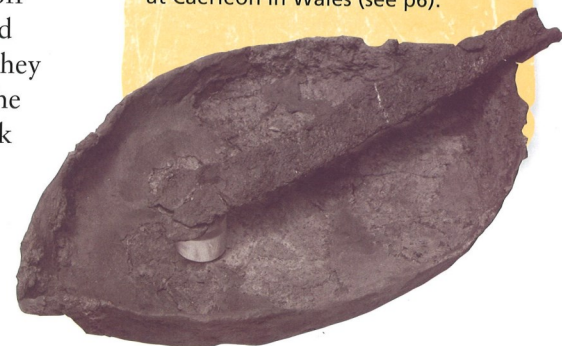
Ordinary Celtic peasants didn't eat fine Roman cuisine. In the countryside they lived off stews and broths, bread and porridge made from what they could grow and gather in the countryside. Poor townsfolk often lived in cramped apartments with no way of cooking, so they bought food from taverns and snack bars.

### Eating with soldiers

Writing found at the army base of Vindolanda (see p9) lists some of the food ordered for the soldiers there. The shopping list included beans, chickens, apples, eggs, fish sauce and olives. The soldiers ate lots of bread and bacon, too. In the army, every century (group of 80 soldiers) baked its own bread.

### Look!

The army was split into small groups of eight soldiers that shared rooms and tents. Each group had a folding frying pan that they carried in their kit for cooking fry-ups! The folding frying pan shown below was used by soldiers at the fortress at Caerleon in Wales (see p6).





## A MYSTERY PALACE

In 1960 a workman digging a trench made an amazing discovery near Fishbourne in West Sussex. He found rubble that turned out to be the remains of a luxury Roman palace, hidden for centuries underground.

### Magnificent mansion

The palace had over 100 rooms, and was very large, more like Buckingham Palace than a country villa such as Chedworth (see pages 24-25). Nobody knows who lived there. It could have been built for the Roman governor of Britain, or perhaps for a local tribal chief. Fire destroyed it in about 300CE and lots of the rubble was taken away, but some of the floor mosaics survived.

♦ A fine floor mosaic from Fishbourne, showing the god Cupid riding on a dolphin.



### Luxury Roman-style

No expense was spared to build Fishbourne Palace. Expert mosaic-makers were probably brought in from abroad to lay the floors. Everywhere had underfloor heating, and there were plenty of shady walkways under rows of colonnades (pillars). The spectacular gardens had pools and fountains, terraces and a view of the sea. A building this big would certainly have needed lots of slaves to keep it running.

◀ Remains of the hypocaust, Fishbourne's luxury underfloor heating system.

### GO VISIT



#### A Roman Garden

You can explore the neat Roman garden at Fishbourne and even see a reconstructed Roman potting shed. The Romans grew flowers, but also herbs used for cooking and for making medicine. For example, they used chamomile and mint for soothing a cold. There is also a Roman garden to visit at Caerleon (see pages 10-11) and at Chesters Fort on Hadrian's Wall (see pages 18-19).

### Dinner at Fishbourne

The wealthy people who lived at Fishbourne would have had a comfortable life. They would have eaten the finest food, cooked by slaves in the kitchens over fires and in wood ovens. Guests would have eaten their dinner with spoons and knives but not forks. Roman writers described how people lay on couches around low tables, perhaps being entertained by singers and musicians.

◀ The peaceful Roman garden at Fishbourne Palace.





## Sport and Combat

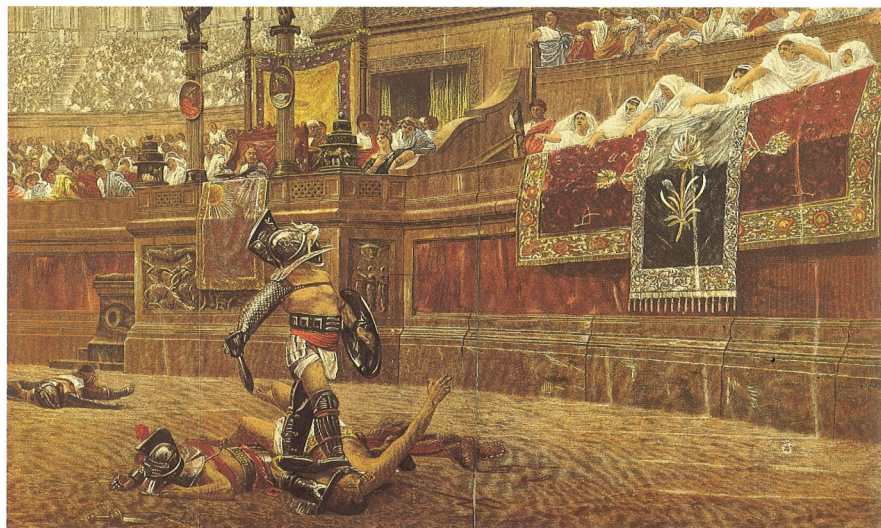
**M**OST ROMANS preferred watching sport rather than taking part themselves. There were some, however, who enjoyed athletics and keeping fit. They took their exercise at the public baths and at the sports ground or *palaestra*. Men would compete at wrestling, long jump and swimming. Women would work out with weights.

Boxing matches and chariot races were always well attended. The races took place on a long, oval racetrack, called a circus. The crowds would watch with such excitement that violent riots often followed. Charioteers and their teams became big stars. Roman crowds also enjoyed watching displays of cruelty. Bloody battles between gladiators and fights among wild animals took place in a special oval arena, called an amphitheatre. Roman entertainments became more spectacular and bloodthirsty as time passed. They would even flood the arenas of amphitheatres for mock sea battles.



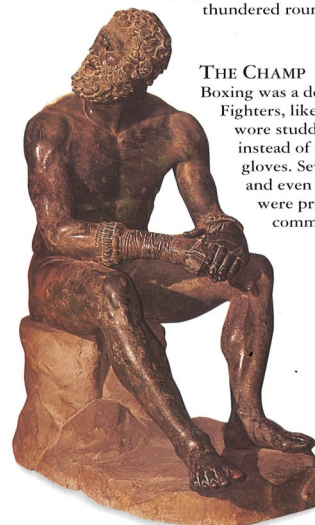
**A COLOSSEUM**  
This is the colosseum in the Roman city of El Djem, in Tunisia. A colosseum was a kind of amphitheatre. Arenas such as this were built all over the Empire. The largest and most famous is the Colosseum in Rome.

**DEATH OR MERCY?**  
Gladiators usually fought to the death, but a wounded gladiator could appeal for mercy. The excited crowd would look for the emperor's signal. A thumbs-up meant his life was spared. A thumbs-down meant he must die.



### A DAY AT THE RACES

This terracotta carving records an exciting moment at the races. Chariot racing was a passion for most Romans. Chariots were usually pulled by four horses, though just two or as many as six could be used. Accidents and foul play were common as the chariots thundered round the track.



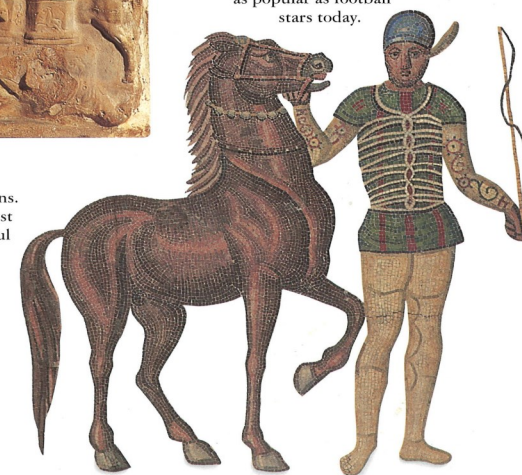
### THE CHAMP

Boxing was a deadly sport. Fighters, like this boxer, wore studded thongs instead of padded boxing gloves. Severe injuries, and even brain damage, were probably quite common.



### THE GREEK IDEAL

The Romans admired all things Greek, including their love of athletics. This painted Greek vase dates from about 333BC and shows long-distance runners. However, Roman crowds were not interested in athletic contests in the Greek style, such as the Olympic Games.



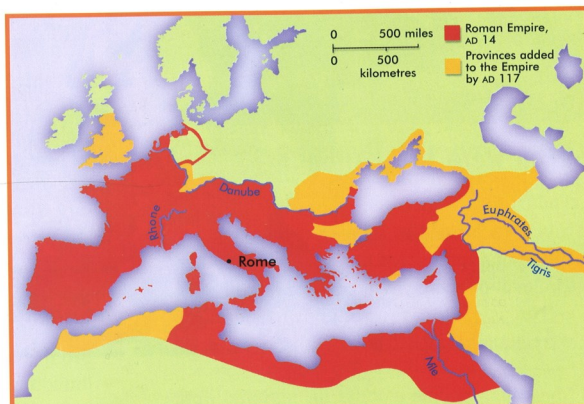
**COME ON YOU REDS!**  
Charioteers belonged to teams and wore their team's colours when they raced. Some also wore protective leather helmets, like the one in this mosaic. In Rome, there were four teams – the Reds, Blues, Whites and Greens. Each team had faithful fans and charioteers were every bit as popular as football stars today.



# How were the Romans different?

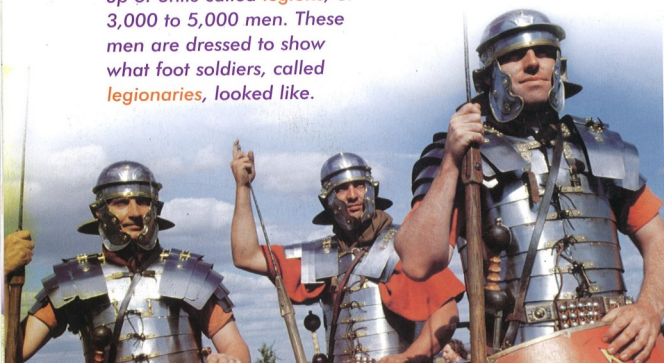
## The Roman Empire

This map shows the lands that were part of the Roman Empire in the early 1st century AD, and the lands that were conquered in the next 100 years. Each part of the Empire was known as a **province**. Every province was run by a **governor**, appointed by the Emperor. The provinces all had to pay taxes and provide troops for the Roman army. So, as the Empire expanded, Rome became richer and more powerful.



▲ Compare this map of the Roman Empire with a modern atlas map. Which modern countries were part of the Empire?

▼ The Roman army was made up of units called **legions**, of 3,000 to 5,000 men. These men are dressed to show what foot soldiers, called **legionaries**, looked like.



## The Roman army

The Roman army was different from most armies in the ancient world. Soldiers in the Roman army served full-time for 25 years and were highly trained. When a soldier retired, he was made a Roman **citizen** and given a plot of land. Often this had

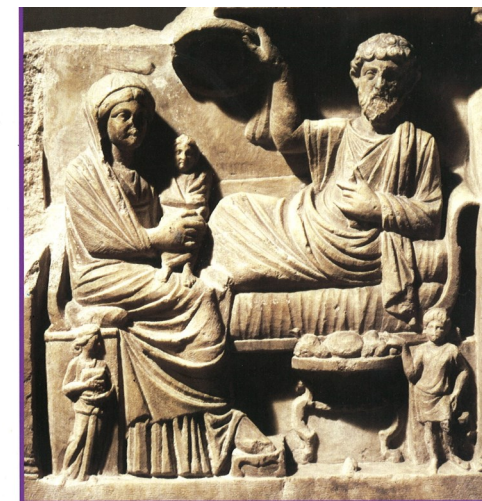
been taken from defeated enemies. Most ancient armies were formed from local people who went back to work on their farms when a battle was over.

## Citizens, non-citizens and slaves

Roman citizens had a special status in society. They had the right to vote and did not pay taxes. At first, only men from Rome could be Roman citizens. Men in other parts of the Empire could earn citizenship, usually by serving in the Roman army. Roman women and most other people in the provinces were non-citizens and had limited rights. By the third century AD, the rules were relaxed and more people were made citizens.

Many Romans kept slaves, some of whom were enemy soldiers captured in battle. Slaves were often given the worst jobs, such as mining, working on the land or fighting as **gladiators**, but some well-educated slaves became **scribes** or **clerks**. After long service, some slaves were freed, as a gift from their master.

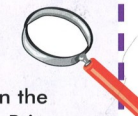
► This wall painting from an ancient Roman house at Pompeii dates from the first century BC. What does it tell you about Roman buildings?



▲ This carving of a banquet, from a Roman tomb, gives us information about clothing and hairstyles.

## List the differences

Make a table, showing all the differences you can find between the Romans and the Britons (pages 6-7). Were they similar in any ways?





Can you find...?



### ▲Sandals

Soldiers could march up to 50 kilometres (31 miles) a day. They wore leather sandals.



### ▲Legionary

Legionaries agreed to serve in the army for 25 years. They were paid regular wages.



### ▲Helmet

How many helmets can you see in this picture?

# Roman soldiers

The Roman army was the best in the world. At first, the army was made up of ordinary citizens. It was led by officers called tribunes, and divided into legions of about 5,500 men. But, by around 100 BC, the army was also recruiting soldiers from other lands who joined in order to travel and make money.



### ◀Digging soldiers

Can you find these soldiers?



◀Fighting soldiers  
Can you find these soldiers training?



### ▲Armour

Soldiers covered their shoulders, back and chest with armour made of linked metal strips.

### Roads

Roman roads were built throughout the Empire so that the army could march quickly to trouble-spots. Most roads were planned and built by soldiers.



### ▲Cooking pot

A Roman soldier carried a cooking pot and three days' food rations with him. Basic rations were grain and salt, which soldiers cooked on camp fires to make porridge.

### ▶Tent

How many tents can you see in this picture?

