Art and Architecture in Ancient Rome

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Week One. Beginnings: An introduction to “the idea of Rome”: what uses does it have in today’s culture? Just like Heinrich Schliemann’s use of “Troy” in archaeology, the Renaissance painters and Jacques-Louis David used Roman history for contemporary political critique. Also: a brief overview of major Iron-Age societies, and a look at the archaeological evidence for early Rome. The wider blend of Villanovan, Etruscan and early Italic influences are explored by a look at votive figurines, jewelry, and craft.

Optional Journal Reading:


**Week Two. Carthage:** Magna Grecia and the Roman conquest of Spain give examples of a Pan-Mediterranean culture adopted by the emerging Romans, but the origins of Carthage show an alternative model of expansion. Perpetual debates about class lead to caste conflict, Plebs vs. patricians in civil war. Power in Rome was a dangerous business, as witnessed by the life histories of Marius and the Gracchi brothers. In a life-long conflict of values, Scipio Africanus and Cato showed two different sides of Roman life. Of the great general, and the great ethicist, whose is the more appealing character? Carthagian art shows a fascinating alternative to the Roman interest in realism.

**Optional Journal Reading:***


Week Three: Caesar: The Invasion of Gaul. Roman imperial expansion was swift, brutal, and violent. Julius Caesar’s genocide in Gaul wrought genetic, cultural and economic changes across western Europe. The fused, hybrid nature of Romano-Celtic art and religious belief shows the long-lasting influence of the Celtic world.

Literature: Catullus. The most intensely personal, and sexually explicit, poet in the Roman tradition died young, at thirty. His verses evoke the sophisticated, luxurious world of the 1st-century Roman nobility. Artwork: The Pergamon Alterpiece shows the flowering of Hellenistic art among the Greek city-states of Asia Minor, but its history stresses the hegemonic potential of Roman authority.

Optional Journal Reading:


Week Four: Augustus: Ovid. Under Augustus, Rome reached new heights of economic prosperity and military conquest. While re-found unity contributed to a sense of revitalization, corruption among imperial elites was a serious problem.

| Literature: Ovid. The Metamorphoses has had a profound effect on the visual, literary and dramatic spheres of “western” culture. From Kafka to Norval Morrisseau, La Fontaine to the Pre-Raphaelites, Ovid’s stories have had an incredible afterlife. Do they inspire us? Artworks: The Dying Gaul, imperial Roman portraiture, ruins in Tunisia, the Ara Pacis. Try the works of Rosemary Sutcliff, if you are sick of “dry journal articles! |

Week Five: Hadrian: Under a succession of hard-working administrators, Rome enjoyed unparalleled dominance over large stretches of Europe, northern Africa and the near East. Religious institutions like the cults of Serapis, Isis and Mithras show the syncretic, adaptable aspect of Roman belief systems.

Artworks: The Antinous motif in Roman sculpture; Hadrian’s villa; the Nabateans at Petra. Literature: Suetonius, Lives of the Caesars. Suteonius mixes biography, history and titillation in one masterly volume, but there unexpectedly poignant scenes in his narrative, illustrating that the truth really is stranger than fiction! What are your favourites? Roman decadence explored: what is it about this world that is so fascinating?

Optional Journal Reading


Week Six: Constantine: We leave Rome, not at its sack in the early 5th century, or even in the dawn of Rome’s spiritual and cultural successor, Constantinople. Instead, we go back to the early first century BCE, to the world of Plautus and Pompeii, of dramatic revolutions that reshaped the look of theatre, and the mystery religions painted on the walls of Roman houses.

Optional Journal Reading:

