

World History

Analyzing Primary Documents for information

Examine the documents below for insights into the Roman Empire.
What can you learn about the people and values of the society that generated these writings?

Source: Plutarch, Greek-born Roman citizen and high official, describing second-century B.C.E. Roman political leader Gaius Gracchus, first century C.E.

He was especially anxious about road building, paying attention to utility as well as to that which was beneficial to grace and beauty. For the roads were carried straight through the country without wavering, and were paved with quarried stone, and made solid with masses of tightly packed sand. Hollows were filled up and bridges were built across whatever wintry streams or ravines cut the roads. And both sides were an equal and parallel height with the result that the road for its entire course had a level and beautiful appearance. Besides these things, he measured the whole road mile by mile and set up stone columns as distance indicators. He also placed other stones on either side of the road at lesser intervals so that it would be easier for those who had horses to mount them from the stones without requiring a groom to help.

Source: Frontinus, Roman general, governor of Britain, and water commissioner for the city of Rome, first century C.E.

All the aqueducts reach the city at different elevations. Six of these streams flow into covered containers, where they lose their sediment. Their volume is measured by means of calibrated scales. The abundance of water is sufficient not only for public and private uses and applications but truly even for pleasure. The water is distributed to various regions inside and outside the city, to basins, fountains and public buildings, and to multiple public uses.

Compare such numerous and indispensable structures carrying so much water with the idle pyramids, or the useless but famous works of the Greeks.

Source: Seneca, upper-class Roman philosopher and adviser to Emperor Nero, first century C.E.

I do not believe that tools for the crafts were invented by wise men. The question of whether the hammer or the tongs came first does not seem important to me. Both were invented by someone with a mind that was nimble and sharp, but not great or elevated.

Source: Cicero, upper-class Roman political leader, *On Duty*, first century B.C.E.

Now, as to which crafts and other means of earning a living are suitable for a gentleman to practice and which are degrading, we have been taught more or less the following: Vulgar and unbecoming to a gentleman are all the jobs hired workers take on, whose labor is purchased rather than their skill. All craftsmen spend their time in vulgar occupations; no workshop can have anything enlightening about it.