Roman Art And Architecture Essay, Research Paper

Roman Art and Architecture Roman art and architecture was the art and architecture of Rome and its empire, which in its golden era extended from the British Isles to the Caspian Sea (”Roman” Encarta 96). The earliest Roman art and architecture is generally associated with the overthrow of the Etruscan kings and the establishment of the Republic in 509 BC(”Roman”). The end of Roman art and architecture and the beginning of medieval art is usually said to occur with the conversion of the emperor Constantine the Great to Christianity and the transfer of the capital of the empire from Rome to Constantinople in AD 330(”Roman”). Roman art and architecture had a profound impact on the world we live in today by influencing modern city planing, architecture, and art. The typical Roman city of the later Republic and empire had a rectangular plan and resembled a Roman military camp with two main streets the main north-south thoroughfare was called the cardo and the east-west thoroughfare, the decumanus (Adam 54). A grid of smaller streets dividing the town into blocks, and a wall circuit with gates. Recreational buildings and shops were dispersed throughout the Roman city(”Roman” Encarta’96). The shops were usually one-room units opening onto the sidewalks. Large cities and small towns alike also had public baths under the Republic they were generally made up of a suite of dressing rooms and bathing chambers with hot- , warm- , and cold-water baths alongside an exercise area, the palaestra.Rome also incorporated libraries, lecture halls, and vast vaulted public spaces elaborately decorated with statues, mosaics, paintings, and stuccos (”Roman”). In the second century A.D., Rome had nearly a million inhabitants (Adam 58). The rich dwellings of the aristocracy and the emperors’ palaces stood close to the communal apartment houses that were several stories high, which Trajan limited to 60 feet. The apartment houses were hastily built by the thousands, “supported only by beams as long and thin as flutes,” wrote Juvenal; sometimes Williams 2they fell down, and they were an easy prey for the fires that periodically swept through the capital (Adam). Like the Americans, who hark back to them in so many ways, they loved apartment houses, both in town and country(Craven 46). The Roman Empire’s most impressive contributions being in architecture. Here they labored and created on a Gargantuan scale, blending utility with beauty. Quarried stone, used in conjunction with timber beams and terra-cotta tiles and plaques, was the essential Roman building material from Republican times on (”Roman” Encarta’96). Marbles lent splendor to the Romans’ buildings, as they did to those of the Greeks before them, but it was a material invented by the Romans, concrete, that revolutionized the history of architecture and permitted the Romans to put up buildings that were impossible to construct with the traditional stone. Concrete vaulting made possible the construction of the great amphitheaters and baths of the Roman world, as well as the dome of the Pantheon and such spectacular hillside sanctuaries (”Roman”). Roman theaters first appeared in the late Republic. They were semicircular in plan and consisted of a tall stage building abutting a semicircular orchestra and tiered seating area.

The earliest known amphitheater (75 BC) is at Pompeii, and the grandest, Rome’s Colosseum (AD 70-80), held approximately 50,000 spectators, roughly the capacity of today’s large sports stadiums (”Roman”). The Pantheon is the only building of Imperial Rome to have withstood successfully the ravages of time and man (Morore 14). The porch reminds us of the Parthenon, but one can clearly see that the columns are Corinthian rather that Doric (Morore). The great vaulted dome is 142 ft in diameter, and the entire structure is lighted through one aperture, called an oculus, in the center of the dome (”Pantheon” Encarta’96). The Pantheon was erected by the Roman emperor Hadrian between AD 118 and 128, replacing a smaller temple built by the statesman Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa in 27 BC. In the early 7th century it was consecrated as a church, Santa Maria ad Martyres, to which act it owes its survival (”Pantheon”). Williams 3As Rome established herself as the center of civilization, it became clear that her destiny in the arts was to be realistic in sculpture, as she had been imperialistic in government(Craven 43). Throughout the Roman world, statues and reliefs were regularly displayed in, on, and around public and private buildings (”Roman” Encarta’96). The style of the imperial relief sculptures ranges from the conscious neo-Greek classicism of the Ara Pacis friezes to the late antique the schematic, frontal, and hieratic style of the new reliefs of the Arch of Constantine. Statues were erected of deities, heroes, and mortals alike in a wide variety of contexts. Every temple had a cult Statue; marble and bronze images of the gods and heroes (”Roman”). In the Roman Imperial Period, portrait painting is best represented by a series of wooden panels recovered from sites throughout Roman Egypt. These works, traditionally called Fayyum portraits, after the agricultural district in Egypt where they were first discovered, were painted in the encaustic technique, a method that uses pigment contained in a medium of hot wax (”Roman”). These panels are the only portraits that have survived in any number, and even though they are provincial works, they testify to a high level of accomplishment on the part of Roman painters. These images reflect the prevailing tastes of the times and provide a chronological overview of the development of portraiture during the Roman Imperial Period. Mural painting is, by contrast, well documented, especially in Pompeii and the other cities buried in AD 79 by the eruption of the volcano Mount Vesuvius(”Roman”).Wherever painted murals existed, colored floors were likely to be present. They were often simply painted in solid colors, but in many instances they were made up of marble slabs of many hues or of thousands of tiny mosaic cubes (”Roman”). Roman art and architecture had a profound impact on the world we live in today by influencing modern city planing, architecture, and art. From our city streets to our football stadiums, and even our tile floors, Roman art and architecture has shaped the way we look at the world.