

Augustus - The First Emperor 27 BCE - 14 CE

Augustus became the first emperor of Rome when his adopted father, Julius Caesar, was murdered on the Senate floor. His real name was Octavian but he was given the name 'Augustus' by the Senate as an honor for his great achievements. He used his rule wisely and built roads, aqueducts and buildings. Not only was Augustus the first, but he was certainly one of the best emperors Rome ever had.



Constantine the Great

306 - 337 CE

Constantine the Great was the first Christian emperor of the Empire. He decided to move the capital of the empire from Rome to a town called Byzantium, which he later renamed after himself - Constantinople. Constantine saw this move as essential since Byzantium was located on the trade routes from East to West. For his many achievements he is known as 'Constantine the Great' and in the Christian church he is known as 'Saint Constantine.' This is because he made Christianity the official religion of the Empire and ended the persecution of Christians.



Hadrian

(117-138 CE)

Hadrian became emperor following the death of Trajan, and he is perhaps most well known for the construction of a defensive wall in Britain which is known as Hadrian's Wall; the wall was built to protect the Roman Empire from invasions from tribes to the north.

As a ruler, Hadrian turned out to be relatively peaceful. He reversed the expansionist policies of the previous ruler, Trajan, which meant Rome stopped looking to acquire new land through warfare.

Hadrian was certainly among the best educated of all the Roman emperors. He was a great patron of the arts, especially architecture. His interest in Greek culture created a fondness for classical statues and architecture, and he supervised the construction of an assortment of buildings, including the Pantheon in Rome.

Commodus

180 to 192 CE

Commodus was the son of Marcus Aurelius, one of Rome's greatest rulers. He adored the gladiatorial games so much that he personally entered many of them and fought alongside the gladiators! Gladiators were mostly all criminals and slaves. This severely offended the entire Empire, especially the Senate. Commodus once ordered all the cripples, hunchbacks, and all other "undesirables" in the city to be rounded up, thrown into the arena, and forced to hack one another to death with meat cleavers. He especially enjoyed killing animals as he once slaughtered 100 lions in one day.



Diocletian

(286 - 305 AD)

Diocletian came to power at a difficult time in the Empire's history. There were civil wars in the provinces and the Empire's economy was near collapse. He was able to establish peace and stabilize the economy. He divided the empire in two halves in order to administer it more effectively. This is what led toward the creation of separate Eastern (Byzantine) and Western (Roman) Empires. However, he is also known for intensifying the persecution of Christians, who still refused to worship an emperor or official Roman gods.

He demanded that all Christians convert to the Roman religion. When Christians refused, Diocletian ordered their execution by crucifixion and beheading. He also enjoyed in their torture at the Circus Maximus and Colosseum where many were fed to lions, much to the delight of the Roman citizens who worshipped Roman gods.

The murders did not truly stop until Constantine's rise to absolute power in 324.

Roman Emperors and their achievements (or lack thereof)

NERO

(54 - 68 A.D.)

Nero was known to be very friendly to people from all stations of life and possessed the ability to remember almost everyone's name whom he met. He was a great supporter of the arts and staged elaborate productions for the people's enjoyment. He even enjoyed performing himself.

As his reign continued, though, his behavior became bizarre. He killed, among others, his mother, and it has been said that he sang when the Great Fire of Rome ravaged through the city. He blamed the fire on Christians and had many killed, either by crucifixion, beheading, or being "thrown to the dogs." Regardless, he had clearly become insane. After unsuccessfully ordering members of the Senate to kill themselves, he committed suicide.



Trajan

(98 to 117 CE)

The Roman emperor Trajan was the first non-Italian emperor. Trajan was always on the offensive as he expanded Rome's

territory to its farthest limits. He was a former soldier who used his military expertise to win campaigns and acquire many new lands.

The Roman people gave Trajan the title "Optimus Princeps", which means "the best of princes." This clearly attests to his popularity among the people. Trajan set up cash accounts to help raise poor children, created schools to educate orphans, assisted poor farmers, and returned property confiscated by previous emperors.

