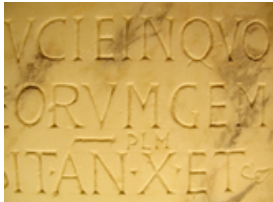


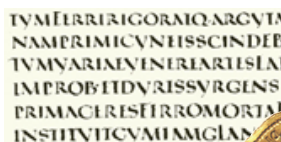
**The development of the Roman alphabet.**



Ancient Latin inscriptions.



Trajan's style monumental script.  
Flubia Emilia Basilica, Roman Forum.



Vergilius Augusteus.  
Cuadrata Capital,  
4th century.



Rustic letters, political message painted on Pompeii's streets.

At first, kings ruled Rome. They were sometimes very cruel and the last king, Tarquin the Proud, was overthrown. Rome then became a republic for the next four hundred years. This republic was ruled by a senate, and people called Senators were elected to do different jobs in the senate. However, not everyone was allowed to vote in these elections. Women and slaves were not allowed to vote and neither were poor people. Those Roman people who were not slaves were called "citizens".

In the 1st century B.C. the generals who controlled the army became very powerful. Rome was no longer just a city; it was the capital of an empire. The Romans ruled lands from France to North Africa.

The Roman Empire's influence on government, law, and monumental architecture, as well as many other aspects of Western life remains inescapable. The ancient Romans were realists, not idealists. The Greeks made statues of perfect people, but the Romans created real life statues. They built roads all over the empire, and all roads led to Rome, it was the heart of the empire. Two thousand years ago, Rome was a busy place. It was a crowded, noisy, smoky, dusty city, with beautiful temples and public buildings.

Down in the Forum, courts were in session, and the great Senate orators met and argued. Even for the poor, life in the city was lively. There was always something going on, like the great State festivals including shows in the theatres, races, and fights in the arenas.

The Forum was the main marketplace and business centre, where the ancient Romans went to do their banking, trading, shopping, and marketing.

The Public Baths were extremely popular. Roman women and men tried to visit the baths at least once every day. The baths had hot and cold pools and towels, the ancient Romans had gods for nearly everything. There were temples all over the Roman Empire.

The Coliseum was a huge public entertainment centre. The Coliseum could seat 45,000 spectators. This is where the ancient Romans gathered to watch bloody combat between gladiators, and battles between men and wild animals. On occasion, they flooded the Coliseum with water, to hold naval battles, where many competitors died.

The Circus Maximus was another public entertainment centre, was used mostly for chariot racing. It could seat 250,000 people.

The end of the Western Empire is traditionally set in 476, when Odovacar deposed the last Emperor and sent the Imperial insignia to Constantinople. After another millennium, in 1453, the Eastern Empire, better known as the Byzantine Empire, fell to the Ottoman Turks.

The classic Roman alphabet does not contain the letters J, U or W. The consonant J was not differentiated from the vowel I until the 15th century, the vowel U from the consonant V until the 10th century and the W (which is really a ligature of V&V) until the 12th century. It must be remembered that while we have these classic roman letters, there was also a current or everyday hand which was written much faster and with less care

The Roman capitals were mainly used for brush and inscription, a pen variety was also available known as the square capitals. These were painstakingly drawn and writing a manuscript was a slow process therefore these were only used in very important works. They were also used in special pages or as headings.

It has long been thought that rustic was developed from the square capitals, but a recent find, the "Gallos Fragment" dates rustic to about 22 BC, and suggests that rustic probably predates square capitals as a bookhand. Painted rustic did not appear until the 1st century AD. Rustic was later displaced by uncials and were kept mainly as headings, introductions and prefaces. Throughout history the current or everyday writing has had the greatest effect of working out new and simpler styles of lettering. It is really from these that the minuscule evolved.

The Romans used everyday writing for correspondence, accounts etc, and these were found on wax or lead tablets or on papyrus. These were written with a pen or stub rapidly and eventually it was found to be necessary to introduce ascenders and descenders for legibility.

It must be understood that development of letters very often went the way of least resistance, the way of carelessness or bad habits.

Examples of this script survive from the 1st century AD. It continued to be used as a high-grade bookhand, even up until the 9th century, and was regularly used as an alternative script for display purposes in earlier medieval manuscripts.