

Volubilis

On land | Morocco | 3rd century BCE-11th century CE | Grades 3-5

Name _____ Date _____

Volubilis has colorful floor mosaics that have stayed in place for nearly 2,000 years.

Read the story

Volubilis began as a town of the Berber kingdom of Mauretania, more than 2,200 years ago. Its rich farmland was perfect for olives and wheat. Around 40 CE, the Romans took over the region, and Volubilis grew into a busy Roman city at the far edge of the empire.

Wealthy families built big houses with courtyards and decorated their floors with mosaics. Some show Hercules performing his labors, dolphins leaping, and the god Bacchus. In 217 CE, the people built a triumphal arch to honor Emperor Caracalla.

Around 285 CE, Rome pulled its soldiers back, but people kept living here. Centuries later, a ruler named Idris I stayed here while starting a new Moroccan kingdom, before the capital moved to nearby Fes.

How it ended

Volubilis slowly emptied after Rome pulled back and trade routes changed. The great Lisbon earthquake of 1755 toppled many of its buildings, and people took its stones for new construction.

Key words

- mosaic: a picture made from many tiny pieces of stone, glass or tile
- triumphal arch: a large arch built to celebrate a ruler or victory
- frontier: the far edge of a country or empire

Wow facts

- Archaeologists have found dozens of olive oil presses inside the city.
- A bronze statue of a dog found here is one of Morocco's prized treasures.
- Building stone from Volubilis was later carried off to build a palace in the nearby city of Meknes.

Talk about it

1. Why do you think people at the edge of an empire wanted to copy life in Rome?

2. If you made a floor mosaic, what would it show?

Try this

Draw a map of Volubilis as it looked at its busiest. Label three things people did there.

Quick quiz

Circle the best answer.

1. **What was Volubilis's most important product?**
 - A. Olive oil
 - B. Gold
 - C. Silk
 - D. Rice
2. **In which country is Volubilis?**
 - A. Egypt
 - B. Morocco
 - C. Spain
 - D. Italy
3. **Which emperor was honored by the city's arch?**
 - A. Augustus
 - B. Nero
 - C. Caracalla
 - D. Hadrian

Go further

Open ruinscape.live/volubilis/ for photos, the Then and Now picture where there is one, and links to museum collections and research. On the globe, Lyra Kael can fly the class there and answer questions.

Answer key (for teachers)

1. A. Dozens of olive presses have been found there.
2. B. Volubilis is in Morocco, near Meknes.
3. C. The arch was built in 217 CE for Caracalla.