

**Western Civilization. Technology:** Engineering the Roman Empire

**Faculty:** Courtney Roby, Professor, Classics

**Week Two:** July 12 – 18, 2026

**Schedule:** Monday - Friday, 9-12 and 1:30-3:30; no class Wednesday afternoon.

**Location:** Lincoln Hall, room 149 and some field work

Dear CAU Participants,

Welcome to ancient Rome! In this summer's inaugural offering of "Engineering the Roman Empire," we'll explore the secrets of design and construction behind Roman technologies, from massive infrastructure projects like the aqueducts to miniaturized automated puppet theaters. Each day we'll encounter a different facet of the Roman technological world: Roman civic and private architecture, the networks of roads and aqueducts that bound the empire together, the surveyors who mapped it all out, the military tools the emperors used to defend and expand Roman territory, and the intricate mechanical wonders of pneumatic devices and automata.

We'll learn together – no need to bring any prior study of either ancient Rome or these technologies. You'll discover how classicists and archaeologists work together to recreate the ancient world from sparse remnants of textual, material, and even biological evidence. We'll see how voices from prominent Romans like Cicero harmonize with those of the engineers, technicians, and even enslaved workers who made Roman technological dreams into reality. By weaving together technical and social perspectives on Roman technologies, we'll create a multidimensional picture of the Roman world that may open up some new perspectives on our own.

Our meetings will mix lecture, discussion, and hands-on activities. As a classicist whose original academic training was in engineering I have my perspective on this material, and we'll make plenty of time for each of you to share your own perspectives on technology and what the past can teach us about our present and future.

What will you need? If you were a Roman you'd take notes on a wooden tablet with an inlaid wax writing surface, but feel free to use pen and paper or your computer instead. A laptop or tablet is recommended for in-class readings and hands-on activities with the digital tools classicists are developing to help deepen our understanding of the ancient world. Comfortable shoes are a good choice, as we'll make some brief walking excursions out of the classroom to explore on-campus treasures like the Roman coins and gems in Kroch's Rare and Manuscript Collections. On Wednesday morning we'll drive over to an open athletics field for some hands-on experience with Roman surveying instruments and techniques (but if you'd prefer to play the role of "supervisor" in that activity, that is just fine).

Looking forward to seeing you all in July!

Courtney Roby