

Review

Cultural Landscapes: Exploring the Imprint of the Roman Empire on Modern Identities

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Abstract: This study explores how cultural landscapes serve as dynamic interfaces between human societies and their environments, reflecting intricate interactions shaped by historical and societal changes. Cultural landscapes, embodying both tangible heritage (e.g., architecture, gardens, and urban spaces) and intangible heritage (e.g., traditions and practices), act as living archives that document the evolution of cultural identities and environmental care. Through the lens of historical analysis and case studies, including that of the legacy of the Roman Empire, this research examines the transformative impacts of political, economic, social, and cultural shifts on these landscapes. Methods include a comparative analysis of historical data and contemporary landscape assessments, used to understand how these spaces adapt to and reflect societal changes. The findings highlight the importance of preserving cultural landscapes for their educational and aesthetic value, ecological sustainability, and their role in maintaining historical continuity. The study underscores the need for integrating historical insights into contemporary landscape preservation and urban design to keep these spaces relevant for future generations. This research contributes to our understanding of the deep-seated connection between past civilizations and modern cultural identities through the stewardship of cultural landscapes.

Keywords: cultural landscapes; Roman age; Western societies; historical imprint; modern identity; collective memory



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1. Introduction

“The enjoyment of natural beauty has a peculiar, quiet, elevating satisfaction”. In the realm of aesthetic philosophy, Immanuel Kant, (an eighteenth-century German philosopher), introduced the concept of “disinterested enjoyment”, a form of appreciation that transcends personal desires, material interests, or practical utility. This concept, deeply rooted in the contemplation of art and nature, finds a surprising resonance in our modern approach to landscapes, since today, amidst growing environmental awareness and a renewed interest in sustainable living, our engagement with landscapes transcends utilitarian views. We find ourselves increasingly drawn to the intrinsic beauty and ecological importance of the natural world, aligning with Kant’s ideal of finding joy in beauty for its own sake [1,2].

This philosophical notion finds a compelling parallel in the way the Roman Empire perceived and represented landscapes. The Romans, known for their multifaceted approach to the world around them, did not merely view landscapes as territories to be conquered or resources to be exploited. Instead, there was an appreciation of landscapes that, in its complexity, is in line with the Kantian ideal of disinterested enjoyment. Their representations of landscapes in art and literature, ranging from the idyllic pastoral scenes to the majesty of urban architecture, were not just about utility but also about a deeper, aesthetic appreciation. Romans, could engage with their environment in a way that was removed from immediate personal gain, reflecting a profound and nuanced understanding of the natural and built world [3].

The concept of “cultural landscape” can be understood as an intricate mosaic that combines geography, history, and culture into a single expressive entity. This concept goes beyond physical appearances, embracing the deep and enduring relationship between human beings and their natural environment. As Carl Sauer, a leading cultural geographer, eloquently said as early as 1925, “*Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape is the result*” [4].

This definition emphasizes the transformative role of human activity in shaping the natural world into landscapes imbued with cultural meaning. Delving into the era of the Roman Empire, we have a profound demonstration of this transformation. The Roman Empire’s approach to reshaping landscape had a lasting and profound influence on the spatial and aesthetic sensibilities of Western societies. The cultural landscape of Imperial Rome, with its innovative urban planning, architectural mastery, and infrastructural ingenuity, has not only survived into modernity but continues to inform and inspire contemporary urban and architectural design [5].

The Romans excelled at integrating natural landscapes with urban development. They constructed cities that blended functionality with aesthetic appeal, as evidenced in their forums, public baths, gardens, and amphitheaters. Today, as we face the challenges of urban expansion and environmental sustainability, this Roman approach has inspired modern urban planning, seeking to harmonize natural elements within cityscapes. Concepts like green spaces, urban parks, and eco-friendly architecture are contemporary reflections of this integration [6].

The Romans left behind a wealth of architectural and artistic heritage which has become a crucial part of global culture. This legacy has informed modern approaches to cultural heritage conservation [7]. Protecting and preserving historical sites, landscapes, and architectural wonders are seen as preserving a part of human history.

We introduce the concept of socio-ecological systems, which examines the interactions between human societies and their natural environments through a lens that integrates both ecological and sociological perspectives. This framework is instrumental in understanding how landscapes are not merely backdrops to human action but are active elements in cultural identity and sustainability. By exploring these interactions within the context of the Roman Empire’s architectural and planning principles, we uncover how historical influences shape modern cultural identities and landscape practices. The legacy of Roman environmental and urban planning strategies offers profound insights into the continuity and transformation of cultural landscapes. As we delve into the Roman approach to land and resource management, we find lessons that are pertinent to contemporary challenges in urban design and sustainability. The study aims to bridge the historical with the contemporary, highlighting the importance of preserving cultural landscapes for their educational and aesthetic value, ecological sustainability, and their role in maintaining historical continuity.

This research contributes to our understanding of the deep-seated connection between past civilizations and modern cultural identities through the stewardship of cultural landscapes. It underscores the need for integrating historical insights into contemporary landscape preservation and urban design to keep these spaces relevant for future generations.

This review provides an overview of the imprints of the Roman Empire on modern identities, with the aim of encouraging a balanced, sustainable, and respectful approach to our natural and built environments. It examines how Roman innovations in urban planning, such as the grid system, public baths, gardens, amphitheaters, and road networks, have influenced the layout and design of modern cities. It discusses how Roman agricultural practices, engineering projects, and urban development had long-lasting impacts on the environment and landscape.

The final purpose is to emphasize both the utility and the intrinsic value of Roman identities, inviting us to view our own surroundings with a renewed sense of appreciation and wonder.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a comparative historical analysis approach, focusing on the influence of Roman architectural and planning principles on later urban landscapes. This methodology enables us to trace the continuity and evolution of the Roman legacy across different cultural and urban settings. We utilized a combination of primary and secondary sources for our analysis, as outlined below.

Primary sources included archaeological findings, ancient texts, and architectural studies from historical archives which provide direct evidence of Roman urban planning and landscape management.

Secondary sources included scholarly articles, books, and modern case studies that discuss the influence of Roman practices on contemporary urban and landscape design. The data were analyzed through a thematic analysis, in which patterns relating to the adoption and adaptation of Roman design principles were identified and categorized. This involved coding, thematic categorization, and comparative analysis. Coding involved segmenting the data into manageable fragments related to specific Roman influences. Thematic categorization entailed the grouping of the coded data into themes such as public spaces, urban infrastructure, and landscape aesthetics. Comparative analysis consisted of blending these themes across different time periods and geographic locations to identify continuity and changes in the influence of Roman practices.

The chosen methods are intended to provide a robust framework for understanding the historical impact of Roman architectural and landscaping principles over time. The comparative historical approach is believed to be suited to this study as it allows for an exploration of how ancient innovations are reinterpreted in modern contexts, providing insights into the dynamics of cultural transmission and adaptation.

3. Roma Aeterna: A Concise History of the Roman Empire's Rise and Fall

"Roma Aeterna" encapsulates the monumental story of the Roman Empire's ascent to unparalleled heights and its eventual descent into the annals of history. Rooted in tradition, the founding of Rome is traced back to 753 B.C., evolving from a monarchy to a republic in 509 B.C. after the ousting of its final monarch [8]. The republican phase witnessed Rome's expansion across the Italian peninsula, vanquishing competing cities and tribes. This period was highlighted by the Punic Wars against Carthage, which catapulted Rome to Mediterranean supremacy [9]. However, the Republic's twilight years were rife with internal strife and saw the emergence of commanding figures like Julius Caesar. The republic's demise was sealed with Caesar's murder in 44 B.C., leading to a tumultuous struggle for power [10]. The curtain fell on the Republic with the victory of Octavian (later known as Augustus) over Mark Antony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium in 31 B.C., and by 27 B.C., Octavian heralded the Imperial era, as Rome's inaugural emperor [11]. The empire's first two centuries are remembered as the Pax Romana, a golden era of peace, prosperity, architectural marvels, cultural achievements, and territorial expansion. Under the Emperor Trajan, the empire achieved its maximum territorial reach, stretching from Britain in the northwest to Egypt in the southeast, binding together an eclectic mix of cultures and peoples under Roman rule [12]. Nonetheless, the empire was not impervious to adversity, grappling with economic distress, military setbacks, and political upheavals. The succession of emperors during this tumultuous period was rapid, amidst external invasions [13]. To address these crises, Emperor Diocletian bifurcated the empire for more manageable governance [14]. Subsequently, Emperor Constantine proclaimed Constantinople (present-day Istanbul) as the new eastern capital, introducing a new era of Roman governance [15]. The decline of the Western Roman Empire was gradual, succumbing to pressures from Germanic tribes and other groups. The deposition of Romulus Augustulus in 476 A.D. symbolized the fall of the Western Roman Empire [16]. However, the legacy of Rome lived on in the Byzantine Empire, the Eastern Roman Empire, which persisted for another millennium, safeguarding Roman customs and knowledge until its downfall in 1453 A.D. [17].

4. *Tempora Mutantur, et Nos Mutamur in Illis*—Times Change, and We Change with Them

The Roman Empire, with its extraordinary richness and power, not merely shaped the physical world of its time but also left a legacy that continues to be felt in our modern urban and rural environments. As the world has transformed, so too have the impacts and interpretations of Roman innovations on cultural landscapes, and the remnants of Roman architecture, law, governance, and culture continue to evolve and resonate in our modern world, highlighting both the permanence and the adaptability of Roman influence through the ages [18,19]. The adaptation and reinterpretation of Roman landscape elements in modern urban and architectural design is a fascinating aspect of how the ancient world continues to influence contemporary practices [20]. One of the most significant Roman contributions to urban design is the concept of public spaces [21]. Roman *forums*, for example, served as multifunctional public areas central to civic life, combining political, social, and commercial activities. This concept has been adapted in modern urban planning with the creation of city squares, parks, and plazas. As noted by the urban planner Kevin Lynch, “*The Roman forum was the precursor to the public square, now a central feature in cities worldwide, serving as hubs for civic interaction*” [22]. This adaptation highlights how ancient spaces have been reinterpreted to fit contemporary urban needs while retaining their fundamental roles as centers of public life. Moreover, the Romans were pioneers in engineering and infrastructure, including roads, aqueducts, gardens, and public baths. These elements have been essential in shaping modern approaches to infrastructure and public amenities. As the civil engineer Fuller remarked, “*The Roman legacy in engineering is not just in the structures they left behind, but in the principles of efficiency, durability, and aesthetics they established*” [23,24]. This legacy is evident in contemporary engineering projects that prioritize longevity and integration with the environment, reflecting Roman sensibilities. The reinterpretation of Roman landscapes extends to landscape architecture as well. The Roman villa gardens, with their emphases on symmetry, order, and the blending of indoor and outdoor spaces, have influenced modern landscape design. The landscape architect John Dixon Hunt noted, “*The Roman Garden was a place of beauty and contemplation, its design principles resonate in the modern pursuit of serene and harmonious landscapes*” [25]. This influence illustrates how the Roman approach to harmonizing nature and architecture continues to guide contemporary landscape design. The enduring impact of Roman landscapes in modern urban and architectural design demonstrates a living heritage, a dialogue across millennia, and reflects a respect for the past coupled with a vision for the future, allowing for a continuous evolution of design principles that are as relevant today as they were in Roman times. This ongoing exchange between the ancient and the modern highlights the timeless nature of Roman innovations and their ability to inspire and adapt to changing cultural and technological landscapes.

5. *Roma non uno Die Aedificata est*: The Roles of Forums, Baths, and Gardens in Shaping Societal Norms

From the construction of roads and aqueducts to the development of urban and rural areas, the Roman Empire’s imprint on landscapes was as profound as its political and cultural influence. During the Roman Empire, landscapes were perceived and interacted with in various culturally significant ways. Roman attitudes towards landscape were shaped by their social, economic, and political contexts. They had a well-developed tradition of landscape architecture, which included the creation of gardens and other designed spaces that reflected their cultural values and aesthetic preferences [26,27]. The Romans viewed landscapes not only as physical spaces but also as realms with embedded symbolic meanings and purposes. This perception influenced how they designed and utilized their environments, ranging from urban planning to the creation of rural estates [28]. The construction of roads, aqueducts, and other infrastructural elements by the Romans also significantly altered landscapes, reflecting the Romans’ approach to organizing and controlling space; in fact, landscapes have evolved significantly over time, shaped by

both natural processes and human activities [29]. The Romans were skilled engineers and architects. Their approach to landscapes was often driven by practical needs, such as the construction of roads, aqueducts, and urban planning. These infrastructural developments were not only functional but also symbolized Roman ingenuity and power. For instance, the road network facilitated military movements, trade, and communication across the vast empire, while aqueducts showcased the Romans' ability to control and manipulate the natural world for the benefit of urban centers [30]. Public spaces, such as forums, baths, and gardens, played crucial roles in shaping community and societal norms. These spaces were not just physical locations but central to the social, political, and cultural life of Roman citizens [31]. The Roman forum was the nucleus of Roman public life. It was the site of political speeches, judicial proceedings, and public announcements. Here, citizens would gather to hear orators, discuss politics, and participate in civic life. Forums also served as places for socializing and business transactions. People from all walks of life could mingle, exchange news, and engage in commerce. These public squares hosted religious ceremonies, public celebrations, and triumphal processions, reinforcing shared cultural and religious values [32]. Public baths (like the famous baths of Caracalla and Diocletian in Rome), were not just for hygiene, but were great social equalizers. People of different classes and backgrounds could interact in these communal spaces. Baths offered various facilities such as gyms, libraries, gardens, and even lecture halls. This variety made them centers for leisure and education, where intellectual discussions and physical fitness were equally valued (*mens sana in corpore sano*) [33]. The emphasis on bathing rituals also highlights the Roman focus on health and well-being, which was a societal norm [34]. Gardens, both public and private, provided essential green spaces in urban settings. Public gardens were places for relaxation and escape from the bustling city life [35]. They were also venues for social gatherings, literary discussions, and philosophical debates, contributing to the cultural and intellectual life of the city. Gardens reflected the Roman appreciation for beauty, order, and nature. They were often designed with intricate landscapes, showcasing the Roman affinity for art and aesthetics [36,37].

The legacy of Roman gardens continues to influence modern garden design and remains a testament to their sophisticated approach to landscape architecture [37,38]. The significance of gardens is deeply rooted in Roman society and lifestyle, as evidenced by literature, historical records, and archaeological findings. They were carefully designed with walkways, sculptures, and fountains, offering peaceful environments for leisure and contemplation [27,39]. Lavish gardens were a status symbol among the elite. They were used to display wealth and taste, often featuring exotic plants, elaborate water features, and art. Hosting social gatherings in these gardens was a common practice among the aristocracy [40]. In urban areas, gardens were integrated into domestic spaces, like the peristyle gardens in Roman houses. These green spaces, though smaller than their rural counterparts, provided a connection to nature within the urban landscape and were an essential element of the Roman home [41]. Gardens also had practical applications in food production. Romans cultivated fruit trees, vegetables, and herbs in their gardens, reflecting their knowledge of horticulture and agricultural practices [36,42]. Some gardens had religious or symbolic significance, featuring sacred groves or shrines dedicated to various deities. Authors like Pliny the Younger, Cicero, and Horace often wrote about gardens, highlighting their beauty, utility, and the pleasure derived from them [43,44]. Archaeological excavations, such as those at Pompeii and Herculaneum in southern Italy, have uncovered remains of ancient Roman gardens, providing insights into their layouts, designs, and the types of plants that were grown. These findings confirm the literary descriptions and provide a tangible link to the past [45]. These public spaces fostered a sense of community and belonging among the Roman population. For an empire that encompassed diverse cultures, public spaces provided common ground for cultural exchange and integration. The grandeur and architectural sophistication of these spaces instilled civic pride and a sense of shared identity among Romans. They were instrumental in transmitting societal

norms and values, whether through public speeches in forums, philosophical discussions in baths, or the display of art and nature in gardens [31].

6. Roman Contributions to Cultural Landscapes: Changes and Continuity

In the contemporary era, in Western societies, the profound inheritance of the Roman Empire is still vividly imprinted on the cultural landscapes, and its pervasive influence continues to witness the enduring legacy of one of history's most influential civilizations [46]. The Roman Empire, at its zenith, encompassed a vast expanse of territories, each absorbing and reflecting Roman customs, ideologies, and technologies. Today, these influences manifest in various tangible and intangible forms, shaping the way modern Western societies operate, interact, and perceive their heritage [47]. Roman contributions in city planning, engineering, art, language, and societal norms have shaped and enriched the cultural landscapes of various regions under the influence of empire, both in antiquity and in the modern world [29,48]. Relating the integration of Roman culture to cultural landscapes involves understanding how these enduring influences have physically shaped and defined the environments in which we live, work, and interact. Cultural landscapes are not just physical environments, but are also spaces shaped by the historical, social, and cultural forces that have acted upon them [49]. Many modern cities, especially in Europe, still follow the grid patterns established by Roman urban planning. The organization of streets, public squares, and open spaces in these cities can often be traced back to Roman designs [50]. The presence of Roman architectural styles in buildings such as government buildings, museums, and even private residences, particularly those featuring columns, arches, and domes, creates a distinct aesthetic that harks back to Roman influences [51]. The architecture and design of courthouses, legislative buildings, and other government structures often draw on Roman styles, reflecting the influence of Roman legal and political systems [52]. The use of Latin in the names of educational institutions, legal terms, and scientific nomenclature reflects the ongoing influence of Roman language and thought [53]. Roman-inspired sculptures, mosaics, and artworks in public spaces, museums, and galleries contribute to the aesthetic character of these environments [54]. The layout and design of public gardens and parks, with their emphasis on symmetry, water features, and statuary, often draw from Roman landscape gardening traditions [55]. The alignment and construction of some modern roads and bridges follow principles established by Roman engineers, impacting the physical connectivity and structure of landscapes [56]. The architectural styles of many churches, particularly in Western countries, are heavily influenced by Roman basilica designs [57]. Also, modern sports stadiums and arenas are conceptually descendant from Roman amphitheaters and circuses, which influences the layout and cultural significance of these structures in modern landscapes [58].

7. Ancient Landscapes, Modern Identities: The Roman Legacy in Contemporary Culture

Few civilizations have left as indelible a mark on the world as the Roman Empire. Its monumental achievements in architecture, engineering, and urban planning have not only survived the passage of millennia but have also profoundly influenced the development of Western society [46]. Beyond the tangible remnants of ancient roads, aqueducts, and amphitheaters lies a subtler, yet equally significant, legacy: the environmental assets of landscapes once under Roman dominion [30]. These landscapes serve as living relics of a bygone era, embedding historical narratives within the natural world and fostering a sense of continuity with the past [48].

As we navigate through the modern urban and rural environments of Western societies, the imprints of Roman environmental management and aesthetic ideals are omnipresent, subtly shaping our perceptions of space and place. From the structured beauty of city grids echoing Roman urban planning principles [29], to the cultivation of vineyards that trace their origins back to Roman agricultural practices [59], these environmental assets contribute to the construction of modern identities. They remind us of our shared heritage and the enduring influence of Roman civilization on contemporary culture [31]. This connection

to the Roman Empire offers a unique lens through which to view our relationship with the environment and our collective history. It prompts us to consider how ancient landscapes inform modern identities, embedding a sense of belonging and continuity within the natural and built environments we inhabit [60]. As we explore the enduring legacy of the Roman Empire in the environmental assets of contemporary landscapes, we uncover the profound ways in which the past continues to shape, inform, and enrich our modern world [28]. By reading the landscape as a historical document, we gain a comprehensive understanding of how the Roman Empire projected its power, integrated diverse cultures, and left a legacy in the physical and cultural landscapes of its vast territory [61]. The Roman Empire's approaches to agriculture, engineering, and urbanization not only supported its expansion and dominance, but also left deep and lasting imprints on the environment and landscapes, some of which are still visible and influential in the present day [62]. Roman urban planning principles, such as grid layouts and orthogonal street patterns, have shaped the design of cities in Western societies. Examples include the gridiron street plans of cities like New York City and Barcelona's Eixample district [63]. The presence of Roman public baths and amphitheaters in ancient cities has inspired the inclusion of similar amenities in modern urban environments. Examples include the Turkish baths in cities like Bath, England, and the design of modern sports stadiums and arenas [48]. The modern Caracalla Terme in Baden-Baden, Germany, offers a blend of luxurious spa facilities set against a backdrop influenced by Roman bathing culture, (demonstrating the long-standing legacy of Roman baths in European spa design) [64]. Situated around ancient Roman baths, Parc des Thermes, Aix-les-Bains, France, is a public park that integrates the remnants of Roman bathing structures with contemporary landscape design. This park not only serves as a recreational area but also as a historical site, illustrating the integration of ancient Roman elements into modern urban settings [65].

Roman triumphal arches, such as the Arch of Constantine in Rome, have inspired similar monuments in Western cities, symbolizing victory and commemorating important events. Examples include the Arc de Triomphe in Paris and the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin [48]. Roman obelisks and columns were often used as monumental landmarks in public squares and civic spaces. Western cities like Rome, Paris, and London have adopted this tradition, erecting obelisks, and columns in prominent locations [66]. Roman plazas and courtyards, such as the *Forum Romanum*, served as centralized public spaces for social, political, and commercial activities. Similar centralized spaces can be found in Western cities, such as Plaza Mayor in Madrid and Rockefeller Center in New York City, in addition to Trafalgar Square in London and Piazza del Popolo in Rome [48]. The designs of Roman amphitheaters and stadiums, such as the Colosseum in Rome, influenced the construction of modern sports arenas and entertainment venues in Western cities. Examples include the Coliseum in Los Angeles [67]. Viewing the landscape as a record of Roman influence offers a unique perspective on how the physical remnants of the Roman Empire—such as ruins, roads, and settlements—narrate the story of Roman expansion and control [68]. This landscape-as-history approach reveals much about the empire's reach, administrative strategies, and cultural impact [69]. The ruins of Roman buildings, temples, and amphitheaters across Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East showcase Roman architectural styles and construction techniques, indicating the extent of Roman cultural influence [70]. The remains of villas, baths, gardens, and theaters in distant provinces demonstrate the spread of Roman lifestyle and leisure practices [33]. Roman gardens, with their carefully landscaped designs, fountains, and sculptures, were considered an extension of architectural beauty. The Villa d'Este in Tivoli, Italy, is a prime example of Roman-inspired gardens that continue to enchant visitors. Roman roads were meticulously constructed, featuring layers of materials for durability and drainage [71]. While not a direct continuation of Roman gardens, the Gärten der Welt (Gardens of the World) in Berlin, Germany, features a Roman Garden that reconstructs the traditional layouts and planting styles found in ancient Roman villas, offering a glimpse into the aesthetic and functional aspects of Roman garden design [72]. The Roman Gardens,

Chester, UK, were created in the 20th century to display the Roman artifacts found in Chester, including columns and other architectural fragments. The layout, while modern, seeks to evoke the spirit of Roman landscaping, providing a historical context and a place of contemplation [73]. The Getty Villa in Malibu, California, models its gardens on those of ancient Rome, particularly the Villa of the Papyri, Naples, Italy. Here, visitors find plant species that Romans themselves would have cultivated, alongside replicas of Roman garden sculptures. The design principles mirror those of ancient Roman horticultural art, emphasizing geometry and order, aiming to transport visitors back to the days of Roman grandeur. The J. Paul Getty Museum's Roman Gardens in Los Angeles, California, offers another modern reflection of Roman landscape architecture [74]. These gardens use classic Roman elements such as water canals, patterned mosaics, and formal topiaries to evoke the cultured environment of a Roman villa. These examples show the variety of ways Roman architectural and gardening principles continue to influence and enrich modern European landscapes, in both preserving historical elements and inspiring contemporary designs.

The famous saying "All roads lead to Rome" reflects the centrality of these roads in connecting the vast empire. Many modern roads follow the routes laid down by Roman engineers, underscoring the lasting impact of Roman planning and their understanding of geography [75,76]. Structures like Hadrian's Wall in England and the Limes Germanicus along the Rhine and Danube rivers significantly impacted the landscapes, serving both as military defenses and symbols of Roman power, while representing the limits of Roman expansion and efforts to fortify and control their borders. The remains of Roman legionary fortresses provide insights into the Roman military organization and its role in empire maintenance: Chester (Deva Victrix), England possesses one of the best-preserved Roman fortresses in Britain; Caerleon (Isca Augusta), Wales, is the fortress of the Second Augustan Legion (Legio II Augusta), and is among the best-preserved Roman sites in the UK; in Rome (Italy), The Praetorian Guard's barracks (Castrum Praetorium), though not a legionary fortress in the traditional sense, is an example of a permanent military camp within the empire's capital. The remains of the Castrum Praetorium are partially integrated into the Aurelian Walls, and sections of the barracks can still be seen [69].

The ruins of aqueducts and other water management systems illustrate Roman engineering skills and their approach to public health and urban comfort. Roman aqueducts are marvels of engineering, designed to transport water over long distances using gravity. These structures, like the Aqueduct of Segovia or the Pont du Gard, featured arches, and precise engineering to maintain a consistent gradient over varied terrains. The principles of Roman aqueducts influenced modern water supply systems. Their use of gravity flow and arch structures are seen in contemporary water management infrastructure. Cities worldwide still use and maintain remnants of Roman aqueducts as part of their water systems. The Roman historical sites and architectural remains are of paramount importance in shaping the cultural landscapes of modern Europe and beyond, serving as enduring symbols of the Roman Empire's extensive reach and influence. The placement of settlements often reflects Roman strategic interests, such as control over trade routes or natural resources, or military advantage. In areas of Roman conquest, the coexistence of Roman and local architectural styles, languages, and customs within the landscape indicates the process of cultural integration and synthesis. The remnants of Roman farms, vineyards, and olive groves, especially in regions like Tuscany and Provence, highlight the role of agriculture in Roman economy and its long-term impact on regional agricultural practices [70].

The preservation and showcasing of Roman ruins and historical sites are crucial aspects of cultural landscapes, particularly in Europe. These sites are not only tourist attractions, but also serve as educational and cultural heritage centers, since the sites of Roman ruins, scattered across Europe and beyond, serve as poignant examples of landscapes acting as repositories of collective memory [75]. Roman ruins, from grand structures like the Colosseum in Rome to the remnants of once-bustling towns like Pompeii, are physical embodiments of historical narratives [32,77]. They offer tangible connections to the past, preserving stories of the empire's wealth, culture, and daily life [31]. Each ruin,

whether a monument, road, aqueduct, garden, or villa, tells a part of the Roman story, contributing to a collective understanding of the empire's influence on the development of Western civilization [78]. For many European regions, in fact, Roman ruins are integral to their cultural identity. They represent a historical continuity, linking the present to the ancient past [79]. Roman ruins help in understanding how the past has shaped the modern world [80]. Symbolically, these ruins represent the endurance and legacy of human achievements. They are reminders of the empire's grandeur and its decline, offering lessons on the cyclical nature of history [81]. These sites draw tourists from around the world, fostering cultural exchange and understanding. They also play significant roles in local economies, highlighting the value of historical preservation. The sites of Roman ruins, in summary, are more than mere remnants of a past era: they are active landscapes where the collective memory of the Roman Empire is preserved, interpreted, and passed on [82]. They are spaces where history is palpable, allowing current and future generations to connect with the past in a direct and meaningful way. These landscapes are crucial in maintaining a link with our historical and cultural roots, highlighting the importance of preserving such sites for posterity [83].

8. *Ut Pictura Poesis*: Exploring Nature in Roman Literature

The Romans, renowned for their monumental architecture and urban sophistication, often present an image of a society preoccupied with the constructs of civilization. However, beneath this veneer of urbanity lies a profound and enduring connection with the natural environment. Roman culture was heavily influenced by Greek philosophy, which included ideas about the beauty and significance of the natural world. *Graecia capta ferum victorem coepit* is a famous Latin expression from the Roman poet Horace's work [84]. It translates to "Captive Greece captured her savage victor". This phrase succinctly captures the cultural and intellectual conquest of Rome by Greece, despite the military conquest of Greece by Rome [31]. Gardens and rural estates were designed not only for leisure and agriculture but also as spaces of philosophical contemplation and aesthetic appreciation. The idea of the *locus amoenus* (pleasant place) in Roman literature, for instance, reflects this appreciation of the beauty and tranquility of nature [85]. The Roman Empire's expansion brought them into contact with a variety of landscapes and peoples, influencing their perception of the natural world. Conquered landscapes were often depicted in art and literature as symbols of Roman power and civilization [86].

For example, the depiction of exotic animals and plants in Roman mosaics and frescoes from distant lands symbolized the extent and diversity of the empire [87,88]. Roman literature and art played a significant role in shaping their perception of landscapes. Pastoral poetry, such as the works of Virgil, idealized rural life and landscapes, presenting them as peaceful and idyllic retreats from the politics and complexities of urban life [89]. This contrast between the urban and rural, civilization and nature, was a recurring theme in Roman thought. The Romans also viewed landscapes through the lens of religion and mythology. Natural features like rivers, forests, and mountains were often associated with gods and goddesses, and many natural sites were considered sacred. They believed in *numina*, spirits that inhabited natural places, reflecting a deep sense of the divine presence in the natural world [90]. Festivals and rituals often celebrated the cycles of nature, agricultural fertility, and the deities associated with them, such as Ceres (goddess of agriculture) and Bacchus (god of wine) [91]. In summary, the Roman perception and representation of landscapes were shaped by a blend of practical needs, philosophical traditions, socio-political dynamics, artistic expression, and religious beliefs. This multifaceted approach led to a rich and varied understanding of landscapes in the Roman world [60]. This complex view allowed them to interact with their environment in ways that were practical and efficient, yet also deeply imbued with cultural, artistic, and spiritual significance [28]. From the bucolic tranquility evoked in the pastoral poems of Virgil to the philosophical musings of Seneca, which intertwine human experience with the rhythms of nature, Roman literature presents a rich canvas on which nature is not merely a backdrop but a dynamic

and influential character [89,92]. The Romans' approach to nature, as reflected in their literature and architecture, illustrates a profound appreciation and understanding of the natural world's influence on human life and creativity. Roman authors and thinkers often explored the relationships between nature, art, and language, viewing nature as a guiding principle in various aspects of life [93]. Roman authors used nature as a mirror to reflect on societal values, human emotions, and philosophical ideals. Through the varied literary genres—from the epic to the elegy, the satire to the philosophical treatise—we can trace how each genre captures and interprets the natural world, not only highlighting the aesthetic appreciation of nature in Roman culture but also exposing the deeper ecological insights and environmental considerations of these ancient authors [94]. In the epic, nature often serves as a grand stage for heroic deeds and divine interventions, reflecting the Romans' admiration for the majesty and power of the natural world. Virgil's *Aeneid*, for instance, is not only a tale of a hero's journey but also a canvas depicting the tumultuous seas, divine forests, and the very essence of the Earth that shapes human destiny. He uses natural phenomena to mirror human experiences [95]. In the elegy, Roman poets like Ovid and Catullus bring forth a more intimate and personal portrayal of nature. Here, nature becomes a confidant, a reflection of love, loss, and the poignant transience of life. The elegiac poets weave nature into their narratives, using it to symbolize emotions and human experiences, turning rivers, trees, and flowers into symbols of love, longing, and separation [96]. Ovid, in his *Metamorphoses* [97] for example, describes the transformation of a nymph into a stone, symbolizing the permanence and power of nature. Satire, another vital genre typically Roman, reveals a different facet of the Roman perspective on nature. Authors like Juvenal and Horace use satire to critique society, and in doing so, they often juxtapose the corruption and artificiality of urban life against the purity and simplicity of the natural world. "*Rura mihi et rigui placeant in vallibus amnes*" ("Give me the countryside and rivers lying in moist valleys"). Thus wrote Juvenal in his *Satires* [98] to express a preference for the simplicity and purity of rural life over the corruption of the city. Horace idealizes the pastoral life, drawing a contrast between the peaceful life close to nature and the hectic urban existence, considering, in his *Satire*, the "*Happy who is far from business cares, like the race of people of the past*" [99]. Lastly, in the philosophical treatise, nature is a source of wisdom and a ground for existential and ethical inquiries. The works of Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, among others, are replete with reflections on nature's laws and rhythms. They ponder the human place in the natural order and use nature as a guide for moral and philosophical teachings, seeing it as a pathway to understanding the universe and the self [100]. These excerpts can serve as examples for analyzing how Roman literature uses nature as a theme and metaphor. The verses not only display the Romans' appreciation of the natural world but also their philosophical and moral reflections on it. Furthermore, many are the works describing nature. Virgil's *Georgics*, for instance, is a poem that directly deals with agricultural themes and reflects a deep connection with the land. The work not only demonstrates the literary value of nature but also how deeply ingrained it was in the Roman psyche and how it influenced their creative expressions. Virgil, in fact, praises the agricultural life, illustrating in his *Georgics*, how humans can work in harmony with nature to cultivate and enhance the landscape [101]. In one of his *Letters*, (Letter 2.17), Pliny the Younger [102], describing his villa, highlights the Roman ideal of integrating architecture with the natural landscape, creating a harmonious and aesthetically pleasing environment. Columella's *De Re Rustica*, an original agricultural treatise, [103], emphasizes the importance of working in harmony with nature for successful farming and enhancing the natural landscape.

In these works, it is, therefore, evident that the Roman approach to nature is something to be harmonized with and enhanced through agriculture, architecture, and lifestyle. Their literature reflects an admiration for the beauty of the natural world and an understanding of the importance of nurturing and respecting it. These examples from Latin literature, in fact, underscore the Roman belief in nature as a fundamental and guiding principle. They reveal a civilization that saw the natural world not merely as a resource

to be exploited, but as a source of inspiration, guidance, and wisdom that profoundly influenced their understanding, expression, and way of life.

9. Historical Relationship between Human Societies and Their Environments

Studying the interactions between past civilizations, like the Roman Empire, and their environments offers valuable lessons for addressing contemporary environmental challenges and promoting sustainable land management practices. By integrating historical knowledge, scientific research, and community engagement, we can develop holistic approaches to environmental stewardship that balance human needs with ecological integrity, resilience, and equity [104,105]. The expansion of the Roman Empire often led to significant changes in land use, including deforestation, urbanization, and agricultural intensification. These activities had both positive and negative impacts on biodiversity [106]. While some ecosystems were altered or destroyed, others were transformed into managed landscapes that supported diverse flora and fauna, including cultivated crops, domesticated animals, and wildlife adapted to human-modified habitats [107]. Understanding the historical patterns of land use and biodiversity in Roman landscapes can provide insights into modern conservation efforts and the management of biodiversity hotspots. The Roman Empire relied heavily on agriculture to sustain its growing population, leading to the development of sophisticated farming techniques and land management practices. Roman farmers employed methods such as crop rotation, terracing, and irrigation to maximize yields and maintain soil fertility. Studying these historical agricultural practices can inform modern approaches to sustainable agriculture and soil conservation. The environmental footprint of the Roman Empire influenced the provision of ecosystem services such as food production, water supply, soil fertility, and climate regulation [108]. Similarly, Roman aqueducts and water management systems supplied freshwater to cities and agricultural lands, while forests and wetlands provided essential ecosystem services such as flood control, water filtration, and habitat for wildlife. The Romans were renowned for their engineering feats, particularly in the construction of aqueducts, bridges, and water distribution systems. These infrastructure projects not only supplied water to cities and agricultural lands but also managed floodwaters and controlled erosion. Lessons from Roman water management can be applied to modern water resource management and flood risk mitigation strategies [109,110]. The Roman Empire's environmental footprint had localized effects on climate regulation, particularly in urban areas with high levels of pollution, deforestation, and land degradation. Urbanization and industrial activities contributed to air and water pollution, soil erosion, and loss of vegetation, which in turn affected local climate patterns and air quality [111]. However, the Roman Empire also implemented environmental policies aimed at mitigating these impacts, such as reforestation programs, land conservation measures, and regulations on waste disposal and pollution control [104]. Roman landscapes offered opportunities for recreation and leisure activities, particularly in urban areas, with parks, gardens, and public spaces. The design of Roman cities and towns incorporated green spaces, promenades, and recreational facilities such as theaters, amphitheaters, and baths, which provided opportunities for social interaction, entertainment, and relaxation [37]. These recreational amenities contributed to the well-being of Roman citizens and fostered a sense of community and cultural identity [83]. The environmental footprint of the Roman Empire had complex implications for human well-being, encompassing factors such as access to natural resources, public health, social cohesion, and cultural heritage. While Roman infrastructure and urbanization improved living standards for some populations by providing access to clean water, sanitation, and public amenities, others experienced environmental degradation, resource depletion, and social inequities [112,113]. Moreover, the Romans implemented various waste management practices, including sewer systems, public baths, and public latrines, to improve sanitation and hygiene in urban areas. Additionally, they recycled materials such as glass, metal, and pottery, demonstrating an early awareness of resource conservation and circular economy principles [114,115]. Drawing lessons from Roman waste management

can guide contemporary efforts to reduce waste generation, increase recycling rates, and promote sustainable consumption patterns. The Roman Empire enacted legislation and regulations to protect natural resources, preserve landscapes, and manage land use activities. For example, Emperor Augustus implemented laws to protect forests and regulate mining activities, while Emperor Trajan established laws to safeguard water quality and manage fisheries [116]. By studying the effectiveness of historical environmental policies, policymakers can design more robust and adaptive governance frameworks for addressing current environmental challenges [117,118].

10. Maintaining the Integrity and Relevance of Cultural Landscapes

Maintaining the integrity and relevance of cultural landscapes is of paramount importance. These landscapes represent the harmonious intersection between humanity and its natural environment, serving as living testimonies to the diverse and intricate ways societies interact with their surroundings [119]. Cultural landscapes are not only reflections of cultural evolution and identity, but also crucial repositories of practices relating to biodiversity and sustainable practices that have been honed over centuries [120].

As globalization and modern development pressures intensify, these landscapes face unprecedented threats, ranging from environmental degradation to the erosion of cultural heritage [121]. The challenge lies in balancing development with the conservation of these irreplaceable resources, ensuring they continue to enrich our world, both ecologically and culturally [122]. Preserving the integrity and relevance of cultural landscapes is essential for fostering a deep connection to our history and heritage, promoting biodiversity, and supporting sustainable living practices [123]. In this context, today stands as a crucial moment in which to reaffirm our commitment to cultural landscapes. This is a call to action for policymakers, communities, and individuals to recognize the intrinsic value of these areas and to implement innovative strategies that protect and celebrate their unique characters [124]. By doing so, we ensure that cultural landscapes remain vibrant and significant for future generations, bridging the past with the present and the future in a continuous narrative of human interaction with the land [125]. Moreover, the preservation of cultural landscapes offers an opportunity to advance environmental sustainability and resilience. These landscapes often embody traditional knowledge systems that provide invaluable insights into sustainable land use, water management, and biodiversity conservation [126]. By maintaining these areas, we not only honor our cultural heritage but also leverage ancient wisdom in order to address contemporary environmental challenges [127]. Integrating modern sustainable design principles with traditional preservation methods, including the Roman heritage, offers a promising path toward enhancing the environmental resilience of cultural landscapes [128]. This approach marries the best of both worlds: the time-tested wisdom inherent in traditional land-use practices with the innovative, technology-driven solutions of contemporary sustainable design [129]. The result is a more adaptive, resilient cultural landscape capable of withstanding the challenges posed by climate change and modern development pressures. Traditional preservation methods are often rooted in a deep understanding of local ecosystems, developed over generations. These methods include crop rotation, water harvesting techniques, and the use of indigenous plants for landscaping. Modern sustainable design can complement these practices by introducing scientific advancements and technology to optimize resource use, such as solar energy for lighting and heating or rainwater harvesting systems for irrigation. The synergy between traditional knowledge and modern science can lead to more efficient, climate-resilient cultural landscapes. Modern sustainable design principles emphasize minimal environmental impact and the enhancement of ecosystems [130]. When applied to the preservation of cultural landscapes, these principles can guide the sustainable development of tourist infrastructure, housing, and other facilities in ways that respect the landscape's historical and cultural significance [131]. For example, using locally sourced materials and green building techniques reduces carbon footprints and maintains the aesthetic integrity of the landscape [132]. Biodiversity is often at the heart of both cultural landscapes and sustain-

ability. Integrating modern conservation strategies with traditional practices can bolster ecosystem services while preserving cultural values. Techniques like bioengineering for soil erosion control, coupled with traditional terracing practices, can prevent land degradation, and promote water conservation, enhancing the resilience of the landscape against environmental stressors [133]. The dynamic nature of environmental challenges necessitates an adaptive management approach, one in which monitoring, and feedback loops inform ongoing conservation and development efforts [134]. By integrating modern environmental monitoring technologies with traditional landscape management practices, stakeholders can more effectively anticipate and respond to changes, ensuring the long-term resilience of cultural landscapes [135]. This approach not only safeguards cultural and historical heritage, but also promotes ecological sustainability, community well-being, and education [4]. Balancing the preservation of historical integrity with the needs of the present and future requires a thoughtful approach that respects the past while accommodating contemporary life [136]. Landscapes can be transformed into spaces that honor their historical and cultural heritage while meeting the demands of modern society [22]. The challenge lies in balancing respect for historical integrity with the need for modern functionality, a task that requires creativity, sensitivity, and a collaborative approach involving historians, architects, planners, and the community.

11. Conclusions

In this study, we have revisited the indelible imprint of the Roman Empire on modern identities through the prism of cultural landscapes, reaffirming the thesis that the Roman Empire's legacy is a pivotal element in shaping contemporary cultural identities. By briefly examining urban infrastructure and monumental architecture, and including the reading of classical texts, we have uncovered layers of historical continuity that bridge the ancient and the modern world. These landscapes serve not only as physical remnants of a bygone era but also as dynamic spaces where historical narratives and modern identities coalesce. The findings underscore the Roman Empire's profound and multifaceted impact on modern cultural identities, suggesting that the past is not a distant relic but a living, breathing influence on present-day societies. The Roman Empire's influence on modern identities through cultural landscapes reveals profound insights into the continuity and transformation of cultural diversities over time. These findings highlight how ancient legacies are not static relics of the past but dynamic elements which continuously shape and are shaped by modern cultural identities.

This study shows that cultural identity as an evolving construct is influenced by historical legacies such as those of the Roman Empire. The continuity, bridging the ancient and modern worlds, suggests that cultural identity is not merely inherited, but actively constructed and reconstructed over time, engaging with the past to inform the present.

The Roman Empire's cultural landscapes serve as arenas for interaction between the past and present, places where historical narratives and contemporary realities converge. This interaction is not a one-way street; it involves a continuous process of negotiation and reinterpretation. Modern societies engage with these ancient landscapes, adapting them to contemporary needs and values while preserving their historical essence.

This study also refers to the role of globalization in shaping the continuity and transformation of cultural identities. The Roman Empire can be seen as an early form of globalization, spreading its cultural, architectural, and legal influences across a vast territory. In the contemporary world, despite some negative effects [137], globalization also facilitates the spread of cultural elements across borders, leading to the blending and clashing of identities. The Roman cultural landscapes exemplify how global forces have historically shaped local realities, suggesting parallels with current trends of cultural exchange and conflict.

The significance of this insight extends to the preservation and adaptation of cultural heritage. The ways in which modern societies preserve, neglect, or adapt Roman cultural landscapes reveal their attitudes towards heritage. Preservation efforts often reflect a desire to maintain a tangible link to the past, emphasizing continuity. Conversely, adap-

tation of these landscapes for new uses highlights the transformative aspect of cultural identity, demonstrating how historical legacies are integrated into the evolving fabric of contemporary life.

Finally, this study may contribute to our understanding of identity formation and historical consciousness. The engagement with Roman cultural landscapes fosters a sense of belonging to a larger historical narrative, transcending temporal and spatial boundaries. It underscores the importance of memory, heritage, and history in the ongoing process of identity formation, highlighting how past legacies inform contemporary cultural understandings and aspirations.

12. Prospects

The exploration of Roman Empire's impact on modern identities through cultural landscapes opens several pathways for future studies and actions. These avenues can expand our understanding of historical influence on modern societies and offer perspectives on cultural preservation and identity. Future approaches could involve comparative studies of how different regions influenced by the Roman Empire negotiate their ancient heritage within their modern reality. Such studies can unveil various strategies for preserving, adapting and maintaining ancient influences.

As we move forward, the preservation of cultural landscapes will increasingly depend on our ability to innovate, adapt, and collaborate. The integration of traditional knowledge with contemporary practices offers a promising pathway to the safeguarding of these landscapes for future exploration, learning, and inspiration. The future of cultural landscapes lies in our collective hands, and it is through our continued commitment to their preservation that we can ensure they remain vibrant and meaningful parts of our global heritage.

This forward-looking perspective emphasizes the dynamic nature of cultural landscapes and the ongoing need for concerted efforts in their preservation and revitalization. By acknowledging the complexities and embracing the opportunities for innovation, we can ensure that cultural landscapes, including the Roman legacy, continue to enrich our lives and those of generations to come.

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