

Roman Mosaics

The floors of Roman buildings were often richly decorated with mosaics. Mosaics were made from tiny coloured stones which they called tesserae. Mosaic floors were a statement of how wealthy and important you were. Poor people would not be able to afford them. The bigger and more detailed the mosaic, the more impressive it was. The mosaic would decorate the floor of the main room. These were stuck to the floor with mortar, a type of cement. Each mosaic used thousands of pieces to make a pattern. Some mosaics have been found that show scenes of history and everyday life rather than just intricate patterns.

The Greeks were the first to make mosaics. They started by using pebbles and then also began to use cut stone with pebbles. The Romans copied their method but just used cut stone instead of pebbles. Villas and bath houses had mosaic floors and some office signs were even made of mosaics. Temples and public areas usually had patterned floors made with the larger cut stone tiles, a method known as Opus Secile.

The Romans used a hammer and a hardie to cut the stones to approximately 8-12mm. A hardie is like a chisel, this would be stuck into a block of wood. Some mosaics had pieces cut down to 1-2mm for very intricate patterns.

You don't see lots of bright colours in Roman mosaics, this is because they mainly used natural stones. Red, used particularly in Britain, was from cut brick or tile. Occasionally they might use bits of glass for a particular effect.

You can probably imagine that a floor made from thousands of tiny stones would not be comfortable to walk on, but this wasn't a problem when you had slaves to work hard for you. The slaves would have to use hard stones, sand and water to grind the stones down so that they were smooth to walk on.



Photo courtesy of JacobEnos, Alex Panoiu, xJason.Rogersx and Son of Groucho (@flickr.com) - granted under creative commons licence - attribution

Roman Mosaics

Read the information about mosaics and find out 5 more of your own facts. Then design and draw your own mosaic pattern or picture. You could even cut out some collage materials for your own tesserae to use to help you create your design.

1	
2	
3	
4	
5	