

FARMING AND THE COUNTRYSIDE

Over 90 per cent of the people of the Roman empire lived in the countryside. Many were slaves who worked on the estates of rich landowners. Some were labourers who found work wherever they could: Others were tenant farmers (they paid rent for their land). Nearly all of them were poor. The slaves had the hardest lives of all and were treated harshly. Country life was governed by the seasons. This picture shows some autumn activities on an Italian farm.

VINEYARD

Vines were grown to produce grapes for eating and making wine. Wine was made by pouring grape juice into large jars and leaving it to ferment. The harvest was in October.

PLOUGHING

The fields were ploughed before wheat and barley were sown in November. Oxen were used to draw ploughs and wagons.

VILLA

The villa was the centre of a large estate. There was a comfortable house for the owner and his family and a farmyard with barns, stables and workshops.



SHEEP SHEARING

Wool was the most important textile in Roman times. The sheep were sheared in April, before the weather got too hot. Sheep were also kept for meat and milk.

SHEEP

Lambs in Italy were born in November so they could grow up in the mild winter.

OLIVE TREES

Olives were an important crop in the Mediterranean. They were crushed to make olive oil. This was used for cooking and as fuel for oil lamps.

LOOK OUT FOR THESE



GRAIN MEASURE

Tenant farmers often paid rent and taxes in grain rather than money. This bronze grain measure was used by tax collectors.

PLOUGHS

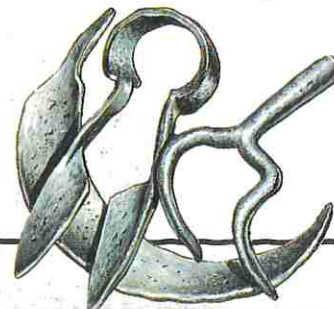
Two kinds of plough were used. The one in the foreground, called an ard, could only work light soils.

TOOLS

Farm workers used iron tools. These are sheep shears, a sickle and a hoe for weeding.

HARVESTING MACHINES

Crops were usually harvested by hand using a sickle, but some large farms used harvesting machines like this one.



LABOURER

This bronze model from Gaul shows a farm labourer in winter clothes. He is wearing a short hooded cloak, a tunic and leggings. With no waterproof coats or boots, outdoor work in winter was wet and cold. Farm labourers were poorly paid.