

## **THE RISE OF ROME: LEGACIES, THE ETRUSCANS & THE REPUBLIC**

### **Introduction to Ancient Rome and its Legacies**

Well before the glory that was Greece began to fade another civilization had started its growth on the banks of the Tiber River. The Rise of Rome from an insignificant village circa 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. on top of one of the seven hills of the area to mastery of the ancient western world by the end of the first century B.C.E. is perhaps one of the most remarkable accomplishments in history. Rome eventually conquered and ruled the Italian Peninsula, most of the Hellenistic world of North Africa and the Near East, as well as Western Europe of areas we now call Spain, England, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and the Eastern European area. Just a village to begin with, Rome was ruled under a Monarchy, and then it became a Republic, and finally the Roman Empire during the time of Jesus Christ. The process was slow compared with the empires of Persia and Macedonia, but far more enduring. Lasting five to six centuries, the Empire succeeded due largely to Rome's ability to organize its army, roads, and governing policies. This meant that Rome was at war nearly continually. She was not necessarily militarily brilliant, but tenacious. They lost many battles, but never lost a war. As the Republic and Empire were administered from Rome, it was called Roman versus Italian like the country today. Rome's religion, language, and culture spread throughout the Western World. English is 50% Latin based. Christianity by the 4<sup>th</sup> century was the official

religion of Rome; and the Catholic Church's organizational structure is based on Rome's political structure. Roman law, liberal arts education and the Senate structure are three more indelible legacies. Romans adopted and transformed the intellectual and cultural achievements of the Greeks; thus becoming the great transmitters of Greek Culture. Rome became the builder of a great historical bridge between the east and west. Even Rome's mythical story of their beginnings by Virgil in his *Aeneas* copied much of the Greek epics by the poet Homer, even putting the mythological founder of Rome as a Trojan descendant. So much of the core medieval learning came from the Liberal Arts of ancient Rome, and this continued even into the Renaissance, which was a time of rebirth of classical learning. America's founding fathers were great students of Roman History. There are many parallels between Rome and America today such as the following: most of the months of our year are Roman in origin, our Social Security system was modeled after Rome's, our Mercury dime and Supreme Court had as its symbol and décor the fasces symbol of Ancient Rome, which the bundles of wooden staffs with an axe were carried by the lictors (minor officials) attending the magistrates of Rome. This was a clear demonstration of how Ancient Rome could punish its citizens and others, but once Benito Mussolini took the symbol when he became the leader of Italy before and during World War II, America eliminated the fasces symbols.

Roman history is divided into three major parts: the Roman Monarchy 753-509 B.C.E., the Roman Republic 509-27 B.C.E., and the Roman Empire 27 B.C.E.-410 C.E. During the Roman Monarchy it was run like a city-state organizational structure similar to the ancient Greeks, and under the Etruscans. In the later centuries of the Empire, there definitely was a decline of Rome in the West, but Rome was transformed in the East into the Byzantine Empire. Roman history thus covers over 1000 years of history, and is very difficult to cover in a few lectures.

### **Geography and Early Myths**

You are all familiar with the boot shape of Italy today. Rome began as a small village on the Tiber River founded by Romulus. Current excavation in Rome actually claims that the initial site was probably established in 753 B.C.E. as is recorded in the mythology of the Romulus and Remus story. The area was fertile enough to grow a goodly amount of grain, but lacked good harbors so trade was not important in their early development. Rome was at the Northern limit of the fertile agricultural district known as Latium, giving the name to their language and inhabitants. Many other tribes occupied the Italian Peninsula, but it was the Romans who succeeded in conquering the others. Another myth that perhaps has some credence is the

story of the "Rape of the Sabine Women".<sup>1</sup> Running up the spine of the Italian Peninsula are the Apennines Mountains.

### **Etruscan Influence on the Early Romans**

North of Rome lay the district of Etruria, where the modern area of Tuscany and the city of Florence are located. Unfortunately, scholars have not deciphered the Etruscan language, but it is known from excavations that the Etruscans were highly civilized, and that their culture definitely helped shape Rome. It is known that the Etruscans had borrowed greatly from the Greeks including their alphabet, but the writing is not Greek. Etruscan art, the city-state political structure, arch, vault, safety pin, toga, and funeral practices using gladiators influenced the Roman practices. Using Etruscan customs shows one of the major leitmotifs of Rome, the copying and assimilating of other cultural ideas. The Etruscan kings were early rulers of Rome, and there is evidence to suggest that the talent and aggressive leadership of these advanced people helped make the Romans important as power brokers among the other people of Latium.

### **The Establishment of the Roman Republic and Roman Expansion**

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<sup>1</sup> The early Romans were mostly men who needed women to help grow the population of the tribe. Inviting over the Sabines for a barbecue, the Romans kidnapped the women and ran off their men. When the Sabine men came back to rescue their women with more aid, it was the Sabine women who by this time were pregnant, and refused to go home with their Sabine men folk, stating that they did not want to lose another husband. The Baroque Flemish painter Peter Paul Rubens' famous work *The Rape of the Sabine Women* is a great painting to illustrate this point.

Once Rome overthrew the Etruscan kings, they proceeded to form a Republic with a set of laws, political positions, and government structure. From the beginning of its republic era, Rome set its sights on expansion into the rest of the Italian Peninsula. At times Rome was on the defensive, but at other times on the offensive, but Rome always used the rationale that it was for "Homeland Security."<sup>2</sup> For centuries this meant that there was almost constant warfare. Rome's steady population increase over the years effected Rome's expansion policies. As more land was needed to pay the soldiers, then they would conquer more territory. Frequent revolts of already conquered people made Rome continue her aggressions. By 290 B.C.E. Rome had conquered all of the Italian Peninsula except for the part known as Magna Graecia (the southern half of Italy,) which was the area colonized by Greeks earlier. Tarentum, the leading Greek city in the area appealed to King Pyrrhus of Epirus for aid against the Romans.<sup>3</sup> As a relative of Alexander the Great, Pyrrhus had dreams of victories in the Western World to rival Alexander's conquest in the east. Pyrrhus agreed to aid Tarentum and the Greeks. When he arrived in 280 B.C.E. he had 20,000 men and twenty elephants. This was the first time the Romans faced a pachydermous "Tanks" of ancient warfare. In two great battles Pyrrhus defeated the Roman Army, yet each time he suffered huge casualties of his own. "One more such victory over the Romans and we are utterly undone."

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<sup>2</sup> Compare current American politics and why we go to war as a comparison to Rome's reasons for doing so.

<sup>3</sup> Epirus is modern Albania today

This remark became famous as our word pyrrhic came into the English vocabulary "Meaning the victory was too costly." In the end Rome won the war, and within a short time the entire Italian Peninsula was Rome's, including the Greeks in Southern Europe.

### **Why Romans were Successful in their Conquests**

Why you may ask was Rome successful in conquering all of the Italian Peninsula? Historians relate four basic reasons. The first was that Rome felt it had unique virtues, which they called Republican values. Romans had more strength of character than others, and the Romans had an inbred sense of moral rectitude of their causes. Romans were self-disciplined, worked hard, and were pious to their family and deities. There is a caveat though. Those virtues, etc. that Rome attributed as reasons for its success in conquering will be held up as applicable when they no longer applied later on in the days of the Empire. Their second reason was that they subordinated themselves to the larger picture. Romans were great, but Rome was greater. The Greeks were individuals first and foremost, but from childhood Romans learned to admire and imitate heroes like Horatio and Mucius Scaevola (left-handed).<sup>4</sup> As the third reason why Rome was successful in her conquests according to her own records, was that the Romans were usually generous with the people they conquered. If people

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<sup>4</sup> Horatio was the hero who held off the enemy single-handed at the Bridge, which there are reconstructions of for students to see this. When Mucius failed to kill an enemy ruler, he plunged his right arm into burning coals to show how little his own life was worth compared to the safety of Rome.

proved loyal, then citizenship was granted. This was diametrically opposite to what was the Greek city-states' philosophy, where citizenship was not easily granted. For instance, in Athens you had to be born there to be a citizen. This granting of citizenship created a cohesiveness that encircled Rome and her new members into a sense of community.

### **The Roman Army**

Perhaps the most important of the reasons was the fourth one, the success of the Roman army. Originally it was a citizen army, the same as Greece. All male citizens from the ages of 16-60 were obligated to serve. Only in the late Republican period did the army become professional under the General and Consul, Marius, in 102 B.C.E. This is when the career men in the army serve 20-25 years. For the Greeks the fighting of wars was a proper and glorious avocation of male citizens. The Roman Army was to keep the peace (pax) so that the majority of citizens could be secure and live their lives normally. Conscription though was frequently required to make up for the volunteers in the army. Men would even cut off their thumbs to avoid the draft as it would make them unable to hold a sword effectively. Eventually, Rome made it a capital punishment to cut off one's thumb. Generals were the only people in the army that were not professional soldiers. They were from the upper class and often from old and wealthy patrician families. They considered leadership in the army either their duty to the state or the means of getting ahead politically. Many

of the generals were stoics, adherents of the philosophy that put little value on their own life; hence they put little value on their men. Thousands of men were sacrificed to win battles and wars. Many Roman Generals, including Julius Caesar, were able to take political power because they had their troops and marched unlawfully into the city of Rome. Roman soldiers' loyalty was first to their general, not the state, as the loot and booty belonging to the conquered was given out to the soldiers. Thus, the Roman Army was like modern armies today. They could be an important political force at home as well as a tool of foreign policy. The organizational structure of the army was copied by many countries. Rome had twenty-eight legions, and each legion had 3600-6000 infantrymen plus officers and auxiliaries. Legions existed over long periods of time, developing their own traditions, history, and symbols like our divisions today. The Eagle standard that led each legion was the focus of a Roman religious ritual. Soldiers gave their oaths by this, and if the standard was lost in battle, it was a devastating blow, and might even require the disbanding of the entire legion. Roman genius for organization showed the best in its army which was highly organized and disciplined. New soldiers had to be at least 5' 10" tall, but it became lowered in the later empire years. Porridge was the principal food, and their normal beverage was vinegar mixed with water, which they obviously recognized meant they would not get scurvy.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ascorbic acid prevented scurvy, something that later centuries would not recognize.

Basically, the frontier legions were not expected to defeat the enemy, but merely delay and harass it until the roving crack troops in the interior would come to do the important fighting. They used the tortoise formation which was a thin line of soldiers that were constantly rotating to the front line. The front line fought so impressively as they knew they would be relieved shortly by the next line as they retreated to the back of the tortoise formation. There was not the concept of fighting to the death or having a large deep phalanx like the ancient Greeks. During the Republic Era war more than paid for itself as the richest areas of the Mediterranean were conquered, Rome had no trouble funding their military budget. The Army was also much more than a force which just conquered territory. Since the soldiers were pensioned off at the end of their 20-25 year stint, they often settled in provinces where they had been stationed. They had married local women, thus facilitating the spread of Roman culture to distance parts of the Empire.

### **Roman Roads**

Romans built an elaborate system of roads. Eventually, there were over 53,000 miles of roads. These roads made it possible to move legions quickly during the Republic and Empire years. Many still exist today. Often they are underneath the modern asphalt, and following the same route that was first set down two thousand years earlier. Many places like England and Italy, you can tell if you are following a former Roman road by its straightness. The first road to be constructed was the Via Appia or Appian

Way. The wealthy Roman patrician, Appius, built it circa 300 b.c.e.<sup>6</sup> Even the Via Latina outside of Rome is still much in its original state. Roads linked the entire Empire from Northern England to Jerusalem and beyond. One could make the trip in six weeks, a time not matched again until the advent of the railroads in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Just as the American interstate highway system was originally built to move missiles from place to place, Roman roads would never have been built unless they were needed for troop movements. Roman's philosophy of building roads was not the same as ours. It was to build them strong from the beginning so they would last indefinitely with minimal maintenance.<sup>7</sup> It is a tribute to how well their roads were constructed that even once minimal maintenance came to a halt in the fifth century C.E. when Rome was falling or declining in the West, Roman roads were Europe's main roads for another 1000 years.

### **The Tenets of the Roman Republic Government: Consuls and Senators**

When the Etruscan monarchy was overthrown circa 509 B.C.E., it was replaced by the republican form of government with two consuls replacing the king. While consuls were elected annually by the Senate, consuls ruled like kings. The consuls retained the visible symbols of royalty, the purple robe and ivory chair that were present in the monarchy. The two consuls'

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<sup>6</sup> What a marvelous solution to our infrastructure problem

<sup>7</sup> There are many diagrams on line to illustrate this, and in my power points

main responsibilities were commanding the army and supervising the administration of the state. Each consul had veto power over the other consul's acts that occasionally resulted in a stalemate. To prevent this, emergency full power was granted to a dictator for six months, comparing it to our modern idea of martial law. The real power of the Roman Republic was the Senate. Initially, the Senate was composed of 300 heads of patrician families or clans. These Senators, who were appointed for life, advised the consuls, supervised the military and oversaw the financial and administrative areas Rome had conquered.

### **Social System of Patricians and Plebeians**

Imbedded in this governmental structure was a social system that was generally made up of patricians and plebeians. The aristocratic patricians were wealthy landowners, and it was from this class that the senators and other officials of Rome came from. Based originally on unwritten laws, they also ran the law courts. These gentlemen farmers comprised less than 10% of the population, and they defended their prerogatives with great zeal against the encroachments of the lower classes, the plebeians or plebs. Plebeians were the rest of society excluding women and slaves. Urban dwellers, artisans, merchants, agricultural laborers, soldiers in the army and small landowners made up the plebeians. Intermarriage between the plebeians and patricians was strictly prohibited. For centuries the plebeians were almost entirely without political rights. Slowly, step by step the

plebeians improved their condition and came to play a significant role in government. They established their own assemblies, initially the tribune assembly and later on the plebeian centuriate assembly. Each had its own specific power and function. As some of the plebeians obtained wealth and power, the original lines between patricians and plebeians were relaxed. Marriage was allowed, and it even appears that Rome was becoming a democracy. This democracy was more apparent than real, for in actuality what occurred was a plutocracy, rule by the wealthy. Wealth was a prerequisite for power and advancement.

### **Roman system of Clientage: Patrons & Clients**

In addition to the ties of family and class, all Romans except slaves were bound to another relationship, which has no modern counterpart. This was called clientage, and originated in the early Republic days. Patricians assumed obligation for the well-being of plebeians. For example, a rich patron or patrician offered his plebeian client benefits like protection in lawsuits and a contribution to a daughter's dowry. In return the patricians got political support by an open show of loyalty and respect whenever the two met. By the time of the Roman Empire, the clientage system was institutionalized and was a major influence in the lives of Romans. Protection then broadened into more practical transactions. Food was given, although it appears more money than food handed out. For a man out of work, the daily dole from his patrician patron might be the only source of

income. Every morning in Rome between the hours of seven to nine, the streets were filled with clients hurrying off to the homes of their patrons to pay their respect and collect money. Generals became patrons of the people they conquered. It was a private form of welfare and social security. Rich patricians even adopted an entire town to pay for all the infrastructure and entertainment. Women and slaves were excluded.

### **Roman Citizenship**

The coveted prize for newly conquered people was Roman Citizenship. "Civitas Romanus Sum = I am a Roman citizen was the famous slogan. This was originally extremely limited, and citizens were only free men born with Rome and its suburbs. By the second century B.C.E. citizenship was given to Rome's Italian allies, and by the third century c.e. citizenship was extended to all free adult males within the borders of the Roman Empire. Citizenship entitled you to vote in an assembly in Rome and to be tried in Rome if accused of a crime.<sup>8</sup> For all citizens their distinctive garment was the toga that was worn over a short-sleeved tunic, the dress for non-citizens.<sup>9</sup> Fashions in togas changed over the centuries. The pleats or goffering were at times narrow, wide, longer or shorter. The Etruscan safety pin held the toga together. Just like today, no ancient Roman wanted to be

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<sup>8</sup> Paul in the *New Testament* will claim this right.

<sup>9</sup> Ancient T-shirt without the inset sleeves

seen in an outmoded style, and it is now possible to date a painting or sculpture by the folds of the toga.

### **Battle for Control of the Mediterranean Sea: the Punic Wars**

Once the Italian Peninsula came under Roman rule, Rome began challenging other powers in the Mediterranean Sea area, but followed no actual blueprint for conquest. As circumstances occurred, then Rome would decide if other powers needed to be conquered. Perhaps the most famous series of armed conflict were the Punic Wars, a series of three wars with the North African state of Carthage over an eighty-two year period. The wars were not consecutive. They occurred from 264-241 B.C.E., from 218-201 B.C.E. and from 149-146 B.C.E. Punicus is Latin for Phoenicians as they settled this area earlier from their original multi city-states location on the eastern shore of the Near East or what approximately the nation of Lebanon is today. These wars would determine who was in control of the Mediterranean Sea and its lucrative trade in grain and other valuable natural resources and manufactured products. By the third century B.C.E. Carthage was a major power in the region and its population was triple that of Rome's. In the first war Rome and Carthage were fighting over Sicily. Rome wanted it to protect its flank, forcing her to build a fleet to combat the naval and merchant marine fleet of the Carthaginians. Rome was forced to build its own fleet, and luckily could copy a Phoenician boat that was found washed up on shore. Both Carthage and Rome lost numerous battles,

scores of ships, and warriors and seamen by the hundreds of thousands over this 23-year war. Eventually Rome won. Carthage's desire for revenge was the cause of the Second Punic War as well as Rome's concern over Carthage's expansion in Spain. During the Second Punic war armies of the Carthaginian leader, Hannibal, swept back and forth across Italy after his incredible infamous crossing of the Alps in the wrong time of the year. Hannibal (247-183?) had an army of 50,000 men including Celtic mercenary soldiers and thirty-seven elephants. Unfortunately, there was too much snow, and not enough food for the elephants. Hannibal won victory after victory and especially the famous Battle of Cannae in 216 B.C.E. where his military genius was conveyed by using a daring convex crescent formation. The Romans attacked the center where they thought the strongest enemy soldiers would be, but Hannibal put his weakest soldiers there. As the Romans drove to the center, both flanks and rear of Carthage soldiers pinned the Romans. So tightly were the Romans flanked that there was no room for them to swing their swords. This is now called a double envelopment, a classic tactic that would cause this battle to be studied in military classrooms for thousands of years thereafter. The Battle of Cannae was the greatest military disaster Rome had ever suffered with 50,000 soldiers slain. Hannibal could have attacked Rome, but he waited as was the policy for Rome to give the Carthaginians their offer of surrender. This did not happen and Hannibal was summoned from Carthage to leave Rome.

One more war was waged between Rome and Carthage. This war was caused by Rome's jealousy of Carthage's rapid economic recovery, and the Roman elder statesman Cato declaring at the end of all his speeches in the Senate, *Delenda est Carthago = Carthage must be destroyed*. By then Carthage was no match for Rome, and the Romans invaded North Africa, where the last battle of these Punic Wars was fought. It is called the Battle of Zama (near Carthage) and the Carthaginians decimated under the leadership of the Roman General Scipio Africanus 202 B.C.E. Killing even the women and children, Rome burned the city to the ground, and sowed salt into the soil so nothing would ever grow again. The 55,000 survivors out of 500,000 were sold into slavery. This Battle of Zama and the complete decimation of Carthage was one of the most brutal conquests in history. It may be that part of the reason Rome was so eager to decimate Carthage was the Carthaginians made religious sacrifices to their goddess Tanit of children. Archaeologists have investigated the huge number of cremated and partly cremated remains in jars, and have determined that around 20,000 children were killed between 800-146 B.C.E. Whether it was a form of birth control, religious convictions or another reason, more on this was discussed in the section on the Ancient Phoenicians.

### **Further Roman Conquests**

Rome's conquest of Greek city-states and Asia Minor were just a matter of time, for the rivalries among the Hellenistic Kingdoms of the Near

East that came to power after the death of Alexander the Great, meant that some of these states frequently sought Roman aid against their enemies. Rome's policy of maintaining a balance of power and keeping one nation from becoming too strong was not to last. Eventually, Rome tired of its task as referee or peace keeper and decided to rule instead. During the second century b.c.e. almost the entire Hellenistic world fell to Rome. The Conquest of Gaul and England will be discussed later.