

ROMAN REPUBLIC

THE ARCHAIC ROMAN CITY-STATE, 753-509 BC

The site of the city of Rome had been inhabited since at least 1000 BC. For the first few centuries it was simply a collection of small farming villages clustered on a group of hills near the best ford over the Tiber River. The legendary date of the founding of Rome in 753 BC can be accepted as roughly the period in which these small villages coalesced into a unified city-state.

For the next 250 years Rome was simply one small city-state among many in central Italy, playing no unusual role. By 600 BC Rome had been conquered by the Etruscans of northern Italy and was ruled by the Etruscan kings over the next century. In 509 BC, with Etruscan power in decline, the Romans rebelled, expelling the Etruscan aristocrats and establishing an independent republic.

THE EARLY ROMAN REPUBLIC, 509-340 BC

By 500 BC, the now independent city-state of Rome ruled only the small area within ten to fifteen miles of the city itself, and was part of an alliance of Latin city-states in the Tiber valley. Rome's key geographic position at the best crossing of the Tiber River, with its relative size and military strength, made it the natural leader of this Latin alliance. By 350 BC the other cities around the hills of the Tiber River had been absorbed by Rome, with their inhabitants becoming Roman citizens.

GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC

The Roman republic lasted in name from 509 to 31 BC, although effective control of the government passed increasingly into the hands of military and political dictators after 133. The basic principles of Roman government were established about 450 BC in a document known as the Twelve Tablets of Law. Essentially, Roman republican government was a complex mixture of limited democracy and oligarchy. Although theoretically a representative republic, the Romans institutionalized two principles that in practice gave greater political authority to the wealthy.

Power of the Aristocrats. The first was that a man's political power should be proportional to his stake in the survival of the state. In other words, since a wealthy man has more to lose and less reason to sell his vote to the highest bidder, the wealthy should have greater political power. This was done by making the Roman Senate the highest authority in the state and limiting membership in it to the wealthy and noble classes, elected by the citizens of Roman. Second, the Romans specified that only those who had served in the army received a vote in government. Since to become a soldier a man had to provide his own equipment, only those with a certain amount of wealth could vote. Those without the right to vote were represented in the Senate by the Tribune, which had veto power over the bills in the Senate. However, without the right to vote, often times those without the right to vote saw their voice in the Senate be bought off by the wealthy.

Aristocrats vs. Commoners. Roman society was consciously divided into social classes based on wealth and noble birth. The upper class was known as the patricians, the lower as plebeians. Throughout Roman history political struggles between the patricians and plebeians were common. Plebeian power rested on three factors: the manpower needs of the state for warfare, the veto power of the tribunes who represented the plebeians in the Senate, and the ability to cause social disorder through rioting.

THE ROMAN CONQUESTS, 340-31 BC

The Roman conquests are characterized by a series of expansions and conflicts which ultimately left them as undisputed rulers of the entire Mediterranean world. As the Romans expanded, they came to face a new set of enemies, requiring further wars. Their conquests finally ended when the Romans reached to the Atlantic Ocean to the west, the deserts of the Sahara and Africa to the south, the barbaric German tribes of northern Europe, and the powerful Parthian state of Persia to the east (the only thing of Alexander's grand

empire the Romans did not conquer. The Romans believed the area to be too far away from Rome to be able to administer it effectively.) Initially the Romans relied upon a volunteer army to expand its power, but as the threat to this new power increased, the Romans increasingly began to rely upon a professional army.

THE CONQUEST OF ITALY, 340-272 BC

By 340 BC the city-state of Rome was dominant in central Italy, but it was just one small state among many. In the following seventy years the Romans conquered nearly all of Italy, becoming one of the major military powers of the Mediterranean world.

Diplomacy and Roads. The Roman conquest of Italy was not based solely on military superiority. Indeed, at this point in its history the Roman army was little different from its opponents. Rather, the Romans used skillful diplomacy to establish a network of alliances. Slowly, the Romans began to overwhelm these other city-states by encircling them with colonies. In addition, the Romans created a series of roads throughout Italy that dominated all commercial activities. Rome could charge a toll for the use of these roads, and, by design, demand all trade go through Rome since each road ended in the Roman city-state. By 280 BC, only the Greek city-states in southern Italy had not been overwhelmed by Rome.

The Greeks of South Italy, 282-272 BC. After the Romans had successfully conquered and assimilated their Italic cousins in central and northern Italy, they now came into conflict with the Greek city-states of southern Italy and Sicily. Unwilling to accept Roman domination, but unable to resist Roman military might, they called upon the assistance of the Greek king Pyrrhus of Epirus, heir to the military heritage of Alexander of Macedonia. Pyrrhus arrived in southern Italy in 280 BC with an army of 25,000 men and 80 elephants organized in the phalanx system perfected by Alexander a half century earlier. Although defeated at first, the Romans reorganized rather than make an unfavorable peace settlement. The Roman armies regrouped into a quasi-phalanx called the legion. Instead of 16,000 men marching together, the legion comprised of a 3-4 phalanxes of 5,000 men each. With this new formation, the Roman army was able to attack at the sides of the centralized phalanx of the Greeks. The old phalanx was no match for the Roman legions and by 272 BC the Romans had captured all of southern Italy and Sicily.

The Punic Wars 264-146 BC

As Roman expansion became the dominant policy within the Republic, the other major power of the Mediterranean began to take notice. While Rome and Carthage, the old Phoenician colony in southern Spain that remained independent after the conquest of the Phoenicians by Babylon, were allied together in the defeat of Pyrrhus, the two great commercial empires were soon engaged in a conflict that would last over a century and leave Rome as the only power in the western Mediterranean.

THE PUNIC WARS

The Roman conflict with Carthage for domination of the western Mediterranean was known as the Punic (Latin for "Phoenician") wars. The strength of the competing sides was relatively well balanced. The Romans had a superior army and a greater population and manpower base; the Carthaginians had a superior navy and greater wealth from trade. There were three major wars known as the First Punic War 264-241, the Second Punic War 218-201, and the Third Punic War 149-146 BC.

During each of these classic wars, Rome was able to defeat Carthage despite size of the Carthaginians navy and the skill of the great Carthaginian general Hannibal. Because of the size of Rome and their ability to adapt the Carthaginian naval tactics into their own, the Romans eventually sacked and completely destroyed the city of Carthage in 146 BC.

Results of the Punic Wars. The Punic Wars had four major effects on world history. First, the Romans became the undisputed masters of the western Mediterranean, making them the most powerful military force in the region. Second, the new conquests provided the necessary resources for further expansion. During the decades of constant campaigning, the Roman army became a professional, efficient, well-

organized, and effective military force, capable of expanding Roman influence to the eastern Mediterranean. Third, the wars against Carthage also resulted in the creation of a Roman navy, which ultimately became the most powerful in the Mediterranean. As a result, this gave Rome another tool at its disposal for the conquest of the eastern Mediterranean. By the end of the Punic Wars, there was no power in the entire civilized world that could match the financial and military strength of the city of Rome and the victories over Carthage only wetted the appetite for more conquests. Victories in battle brought wealth from plunder, slaves for cheap labor, new lands to farm, control of trade routes, provinces for taxation, and glory and power for generals. Finally, in many ways the Roman victory in the Punic Wars laid the cultural foundation for European civilization. Latin, rather than Phoenician, was to become the language of culture, law and religion in Europe for the next 1,800 years.

ROMAN IMPERIALISM IN THE EAST

Soon, the Romans turned their attention to attempts to conquer the eastern Mediterranean. In 200 BC the Romans entered the Greek peninsula. The now fully developed Roman legion outmatched the phalanxes the Greeks had relied upon. By 171 BC the Romans had completely annexed the Greek peninsula. The Romans then turned their attention to the near eastern regions of Syria and Palestine. However, by 62 BC the Romans had completely conquered the near eastern regions, which included the Jews of Palestine. However, the Romans did not keep moving east as Alexander did 250 years earlier. Because of the distance from home and the strength of the new Persian empire, Rome did not make any real attempts to bring the middle east or India under the control of Rome. Rome then moved its attention to the remaining Hellenistic kingdom of Egypt. Again, the Roman legions proved to be too much for the antiquated phalanx military, and in 31 BC, Egypt became a Roman province.

SOCIAL DISINTEGRATION AND CIVIL WARS, 135-31 BC

Social consequences of the Roman conquests. Two centuries of constant warfare and imperial expansion had created profound changes in the nature of Roman society.

Wealth. Plunder and taxation of the new provinces produced a new, immensely wealthy aristocratic class. However, the wealthy vs. commoner debate began anew as both sides wanted to cash in on the new wealth found in the city of Rome.

Professional Army. As warfare was a constant within Roman society, the need for soldiers could not be met by volunteers alone. Therefore, many plebeians were drafted into the army. The soldiers became increasingly loyal to their generals who brought them plunder and victory and battle. In addition, the right to vote was still based on military service. As more and more plebeians served in the military, the power of the plebeian class increased.

These and related social changes created a crisis in the Roman society culminating in peasant uprisings, slave revolts, civil wars and the ultimate change to dictators to restore the crumbling social order.

The Gracchi Brothers. The first political manifestation of the social problems facing Rome came about because of the attempted reforms of the Gracchi brothers, who served as Plebeian Tribunes between 137 and 121 BC. Their reforms included a call for the distribution of state land to displaced peasants, a variety of programs to improve the conditions of the commoners and the army, laws against corruption, and the extension of the franchise (vote) to certain groups of non-Romans. Their plans aroused great fear among the aristocrats, who correctly recognized that they would lose a great deal of power and control over Roman society (and money) if the reforms were enacted. Though the brothers were killed in political riots, their attempted reforms demonstrated both the seriousness of the social problems facing Rome and the rising power of the commoner, which could be increasingly manipulated by the promises of influential people.

Marius and Military Reforms. The crisis in Roman society was further compounded by a series of military defeats in northern Italy, northwest Africa and Palestine. The major threat came from a group of Germanic tribes which invaded northern Italy and defeated the Roman armies between 113-105 BC.

Roman power was restored under the leadership of Marius, a general who was given dictatorial powers by the Senate in 107 and defeated the Germans. Marius did away completely with the volunteer army, which he claimed was inefficient with dealing with immediate threats to Roman power, and replaced it with a drafted professional army. The motivation for this new army was money instead of public service, which meant loyalty would remain with whoever could provide the money to the soldiers. In addition, the professional army created a problem for the plebeians who could no longer use the army as a means of achieving full Roman citizenship.

Sulla 88-79 BC. A final threat to the Roman republic came from the King of Palestine, Mithridates VI. He united most of the near east and parts of Greece in attempt to overthrow Roman rule in the region. The Senate placed Sulla in charge of the campaigns to restore Roman power in the region. However, Marius was not in favor of Sulla, but he was defeated in the Senate. Feeling threatened by a possible weakening of his political power, Marius initiated a coup in 87, seized control of Rome, massacred all opponents and established himself as unanimous dictator and declared Sulla a traitor.

After Sulla defeated Mithridates in 86, he returned to Rome with his army. Declaring himself a war hero and a person who would benefit the plebeians, Sulla ousted Marius and became dictator himself in 82. Another reign of terror followed, in which hundreds of aristocrats who had followed Marius were executed. After attempting to reform the rapidly disintegrating government, Sulla retired in 79 leaving a political vacuum in the Roman government.

THE FALL OF THE ROMAN REPUBLIC

The complex history of the civil wars leading to the fall of the Roman republic and establishment of the Roman empire can be divided into three periods, each dominated by a different warlord.

Pompey, 79-49 BC. Initially power in Rome fell into the hands of one of Sulla's followers, Pompey, who campaigned successfully against rebels in Spain (81-72), and against Cilician pirates (67). Next he campaigned with Sulla against Mithridates. These military successes combined with wealth from plunder and the loyalty of his army allowed Pompey to become the most powerful man in Rome. However, his power was not absolute. Crassus was the wealthiest man in Rome (he had acquired his wealth from taking over the lands of those killed by Marius and Sulla) and had command of a large army, and Julius Caesar who had restored Roman dominance in northern Africa and the western Mediterranean. In an attempt to solidify his power in Rome, Pompey formed a political alliance with Crassus and Caesar known as the First Triumvirate in 61 BC.

Each of the three triumvirs immediately set out attempting to secure absolute power for himself by establishing a military reputation and creating a personal army. As senior ruler, Pompey remained the master of Rome. Crassus became governor of Syria and used his money to put together an army to attempt to conquer the new Persian empire under the control of the Parthians. However, he was disastrously defeated and killed by the Parthians in 53. This left only Pompey and Caesar as the only viable military leaders of Rome.

Caesar, 59-44 BC. Caesar, meanwhile, has conquered Gaul (modern France) from 58-52. Through skillful propaganda in his book *The Gallic Wars* he presented himself as the greatest living Roman, and created a powerful army loyal only to himself. Caesar was ordered by the pro-Pompey Senate to disband his force. When he refused, civil war broke out, lasting from 49-47 BC and raged throughout the entire Roman lands. In the end, Pompey was defeated and assassinated by Caesar's army, which was victorious.

Although never assuming the title of emperor over the Roman Empire, Caesar was absolute dictator from 47-44 BC, during which time he established a series of important government, economic and social reforms. During this time, the city of Rome was void of riots and other social disturbances. However, those who were still sympathetic to Pompey and Senators who were upset about the loss of political power of the Senate assassinated Caesar in the Senate building in 44 BC.

Augustus, 44-31 BC. The death of Caesar did not restore the power of the Senate and the republic. Rather, Antony, Caesar's most important general, and Caesar's nephew Octavian, rallied Caesar's armies. They decisively defeated the republicans at the battle of Philippi in 42 BC, then murdered all remaining republicans in the city of Rome. Almost immediately after their victory, Antony and Octavian argued and another civil war broke out. The forces of Antony, joined with those of Cleopatra of Egypt, were crushed at the naval battle of Actium in 31 BC.; the defeated rulers fled to Egypt, where they committed suicide. Egypt was annexed, and Octavian returned to Rome in triumph and the only military leader within the entire empire of Rome. The battered remnants of the Senate proclaimed him Augustus (the appointed one), and supreme ruler of the empire. The republic was now officially over replaced by imperial dictatorship.

ROMAN EMPIRE (31 BC - 284 AD)

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES BY AUGUSTUS (31 BC- 14 AD)

Dictatorship. After decades of costly civil wars and numerous purges, the Romans, both aristocratic and commoners, were ready for peace. Augustus' victory at the battle of Actium (31BC) left him as the sole remaining warlord in the Roman Mediterranean region. He returned to Rome in triumph and assumed absolute rule. Remembering the fate of his uncle and adopted father, Julius Caesar, Augustus wisely adopted the policy of maintaining the fiction of old republican institutions such as the Senate, while retaining all real authority. Thus Augustus always consulted with the Senate on major decisions; on the other hand, he always made his wishes known to the Senate, and they were more than happy (bribery, appointments) to honor the First Roman by agreeing to institute all of his policies.

Administration. As the true founder of the Roman Imperial Government, Augustus established a working imperial system that would keep Rome in power for over 300 years. His major policies and achievements included the creation of a professional standing army designed for the defense of the frontiers; regularization of taxes and administration; and the utilization of the old senatorial ruling class as military commanders, provincial governors, and administrators, thus gaining their cooperation by providing them profits and power through the new imperial system.

Creation of the empire. Augustus made a conscious decision to end imperial expansion. Instead he established the boundaries of the empire along strong defensible frontiers such as rivers (Rhine and Danube), mountains (in Anatolia) and deserts (Syria and North Africa). Although Britain was added to the empire by Claudius in 43, the imperial boundaries remained for the most part unchanged for the next 400 years. Augustus' long reign of forty-five years provided the city of Rome the peace and security it needed to recover from the years of violent civil wars. In addition, the Mediterranean world saw an expansion of peace and prosperity it had not ever seen. Once established, the Roman system of imperial government became apparent to everyone (with the exception of the Jews) and all of the people of the Roman empire came to accept its burdens (taxation) as the price of its benefits.

Succession to the Throne. With so much power in the hands of the emperor, and the with the security and prosperity of the state so dependent on the skill and wisdom of this single man, the selection of a new emperor (or the removal of an incompetent one) became the major political issue for imperial Rome. There were four basic options: election by the Senate, hereditary succession, adoption, and military coup. Although each of these methods were used at times, in the long run the military was usually the deciding factor in who would be the next emperor.

ECONOMY

Trade. By the first century AD, the city of Rome had become the largest in the Mediterranean world, with a population as high as half a million people. To feed this massive population, the Romans were required to import grain from Sicily, North Africa, and most important, Egypt. The long-term effects of this grain dependency were twofold. On the one hand, it meant an increasing integration of the economy of the entire Mediterranean, by which all of these regions became increasingly dependent on each other by becoming specialized in the products they produce. Therefore, they would all be interested in keeping the region stable, even if this meant allowing Rome to remain dominant. On the other hand, this economic dependence meant the entire economy of the Mediterranean was somewhat fragile. An economic depression (caused by weather, currency, etc) in one area would have serious repercussions throughout the entire region, which

since it was ruled by Rome, would be blamed on the Romans. This will eventually lead to challenges against Roman supremacy.

International Trade. During the Roman period international trade also expanded significantly. Trading connections were made into parts Africa (especially the east coast), Arabia, India, and China. It was thus during this period that all of the great civilized regions of the Ancient World - Rome, the Middle East, India and China - were for the first time connected by trade. Because of the profits that could be made from trade with these other regions, Romans actively sought out ways to increase the trade. Since most of the trading activity was the east of Rome, the economic center of the empire slowly moved east also.

Roman City Life. Because of the wealth that was centered in the city of Rome, its lifestyle was one of luxury for the ancient world. Great buildings were erected to honor the glory of the city. Large public baths were built for the inhabitants of the city. Running water was provided through a series of aqueducts, and waste water was removed from the city via the Cloaca Maxima. Increasingly, however, these benefits of living in Rome were available only to the wealthy. The commoners, lived in tenement housing which had running water and waste removal only on the first floor. In order to appease the commoner from causing problems, emperors (beginning with Julius Caesar) increasingly provided state welfare to the commoners and provided entertainment at the public stadiums. By the time Rome was no longer capital of the empire, most commoners (and aristocrats) spent their entire lives eating and drinking state provided bread and wine and going to the stadium for gladiator games or whatever the day's entertainment was planned to be.

THE FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Constantinople. Because of the increasing wealth coming from the Eastern Mediterranean in terms of international trade, Constantine created a new capital of the empire in the Turkey region. From this highly defensible position, he could command the trade routes of the Europeans and the Asians. In addition, Constantine after his conversion felt his capital would be a truly Christian capital without the moral problems associated with Roman life. Immediately, the city became wealthy and a rivalry emerged between Constantinople in the east and Rome in the west. In the end, Constantinople was better equipped to remain a power and Rome would eventually lose power in the Mediterranean.

REASONS FOR THE DECLINE OF ROMAN POWER

Bureaucracy. As the emperor of the Roman empire left Rome, left behind was an inefficient bureaucracy incapable of making decisions. Because of the power vacuum left with the move of the emperor, many people attempted to move up in power roles of the new government. Corruption became widespread as people positioned themselves in the government. Instead of moving to keep Rome at the forefront of commercial and military power, the bureaucratic Roman government was unable to make the necessary decisions.

Economic Problems. An important factor in the economic decay of the empire was decreasing population and productivity. As certain areas of the empire began to deal with soil depletion, the entire imperial economy went into recession. As the productivity decreased, so did the tax revenues of Rome. As an effort to increase government revenues, the leaders of Rome increased taxes. The vicious cycle continued, until the burden on the poorer regions in the western empire was very great. This eventually led to a disenchantment with the city of Rome throughout the empire. As the disenchantment increased, the power of Rome decreased.

Military decline. By the fourth century AD (300s), the Roman legion was no longer the premier fighting force in the world. A new innovation from the near east, the stirrup, made the mounted cavalry an impressive, and extremely mobile, fighting force. While the eastern empire adopted the cavalry as part of its army, which led to its survival from outside invasion, the western empire would not adopt the cavalry (bureaucracy and allegiance to the legion) and were outmatched by the cavalries of invading armies.

THE COLLAPSE OF ROMAN POWER

By about 350 the Huns had moved into eastern Europe from Asia and began attacking the Germanic tribe of the Goths. Trapped between the powerful Huns and the inferior legions of the Romans, the Goths decided to battle the Romans and seek protection within the natural borders of the Roman Empire. They crossed the Danube River into Roman territory, and in 378 completely crushed the Roman army at the battle of Adrianople, killing the emperor. The Roman army never recovered.

The eastern half of the empire was able to defend from both the Germanic tribes and the Huns by buying off the various groups and by adopting the cavalry army. The eastern empire was forced to pay the various invading Germanic tribes to defend against the Huns. The Goths, however, became upset with the city of

Rome, and in 410 Alaric the Goth attacked and sacked Rome. The Romans attempted to reinstate their government after the Goths left the city, but in 476 the emperor Romulus Augustus was murdered. The death of this emperor ended any hopes of Rome restoring its power.

Despite the imperial Roman propaganda that the city of Rome would rule the world forever, no state or civilization lasts in power forever. Considering the numerous problems facing the city of Rome in its final two centuries of power, perhaps the question should not be why did it fall, but rather why did it last so long as it did.