Rome: From Republic to Empire

The Emergence of the Roman Republic

Nobody knows the origins of Etruria or the Etruscans

Possibly eastern origins, but some argue indigenous Italian origins

Language is partially known

Most knowledge of Etruscans comes from Greek and Roman sources

Etruscan communities were independent city-states linked in a religious confederation

The recognition of shared ancestral descent

Governments were run by councils and elected magistrates

The Etruscan city-states conquered and subjugated peoples in Italy and took to the sea as traders and pirates where they competed with the Greek settlements in Italy and the Phoenicians in Carthage

In the 7th century BCE Etruscan chieftains extended their power into northern Italy and south into Latium and further south towards Greek-settled Campania (Naples)

The Etruscans peaked before 500 BCE

By 400 BCE Celts from Gaul had driven the Etruscans from northern Italy (Cisalpine Gaul) and the Etruscan cities gradually declined losing their independence and traditions

Nevertheless, the Etruscans had a profound effect on Rome

Rome

Roman religion was strongly influenced by the Etruscans

To divine the will of mysterious forces the Romans copied Etruscan rites for interpreting the omens of the numerous gods who were thought to intervene in human affairs

Like Greeks

It’s thought that the freedom that the Romans accorded to women was also the effect of the influence of the Etruscans

Unlike Greek women, Etruscan women appeared in public, were guests at banquets with their husbands, attended and participated in athletic contests, were literate, and were mentioned on tomb inscriptions

Like the Greek city states, Rome seems to be located at the site of easily defensible geography

It was located where the Tiber river emerges from the foothills fifteen miles from the sea at Capitoline Hill

The site was near a ford of the river and close to many trails that converged in the area

Etruscan kings established themselves in Latium and Rome in the 6th century BCE

Roman kings may have been influenced by the Etruscans

Although one family represented the Roman royal lineage, an aristocratic council, the Senate, had to approve the candidate for the throne and only the assembly of the Roman people could bestow the *imperium* on the king

The *imperium* was the right to enforce commands by fines, arrest, or corporal or capital punishment

The king was the chief priest, judge, and military leader

According to legend, the Roman Senate was formed when the founder (original ancestor) of Rome, Romulus, chose 100 of Rome’s leading men (kinsmen?) to advise him

The early Senate had no formal executive or legislative authority

It met only when the king needed advice

It was however very influential as the king sought not only advice but support

The curiate assembly was made up of all citizens and met only when summoned by the king

Its job was to listen to and ratify the king’s decrees

Roman citizens voted not as individuals (democracy) but as members of groups

Citizens were registered in 30 groups and each group had a single vote cast according to the will of its majority

Of course, the foundation of Roman society was the family

The father held imperium over the family supervising familial religious rites and the worship of ancestors

This authority extended to the children even in adulthood

Children could be punished to the point of execution or being sold into slavery

The wife was protected and presided over by the imperium of her father

And was judged by a court of her male relatives in cases of serious offenses pertaining to the familial relationship

Roman wives were the administrators of their households

They controlled access to storerooms

Kept accounts

Supervised slaves

Reared children

Women could own and sell of property and enter into contracts with the approval of her male guardians

Heads of aristocratic families extended their influence to (distant kinsmen) through clientage

Clientage was a formal institution where a patron (father) provided a client (a dependent) physical, legal, and economic assistance and protection

Clients voted as patrons wished and did any jobs requested of him

Hierarchical relationship

Greater Roman society was also organized hierarchically into two hereditary classes

Wealth did not define classes

Descent defined classes

The Patricians (fathers)

Originally dominated political authority

Served as priests

Served in Senate

Could hold office

The Plebes (children)

Small farmers

Laborers

Artisans

Were clients of the patricians

The Development of the Roman Republic and Constitution

According to Roman tradition in 509 BCE some atrocity committed by a member of the royal family caused a revolt and drove the last king from Rome

The patricians then chose not to replace the king but instead to establish a republic

The republic had an unwritten constitution

It initially simply transferred the duties and responsibilities of the king to the elected magistrates

Two patricians were annually chosen to be consuls and invested with *imperium*

They led the army, oversaw the religion, and acted as judges

They used the traditional symbols of royal authority

Purple robes, ivory chairs, and guards that bared the symbol of authority, the fasces

A bundle of sticks wrapped around an axe that symbolized power and restraint

As consuls they had the power to discipline citizens serving in the army outside of the city, but in Rome citizens had the right to appeal a ruling of a consul to the popular assembly

Checks on the consular office discouraged them from taking swift action, initiative, and change

Consular authority in the field of military operations was assigned to one consul

If there was a conflict between the two consuls over this issue, then the Senate would assign a dictator for six months

As Rome’s wars grew longer and more difficult, proconsulships were created in 325 BCE extending and maintaining the continuity of command

However this risked being taken advantage of by ambitious men

Consuls were assisted by quaestors, praetors, and censors

(Expansion of the office and power)

Quaestors were financial officers

Praetors were involved in judicial affairs, but they could be granted a general’s *imperium* in the field for over a year

Censors determined the status and tax liability of each citizen

These were usually senior senators

By the 4th century BCE censors also gained the right to expel senators who disgraced the Senate with their behavior

The Senate was a deliberative body and continuously in session

Senators were prominent patricians

Clan leaders

Patrons of many clients

The Senate controlled the finances and foreign policy and was very influential

The centuriate assembly was the Roman army when it convened to deliberate

It was the most important popular assembly

It elected the consuls and magistrates

Voted on bills put before it by the senate

Made decisions of war and peace

Served as a court of appeals

It was named for the centuries in which the members of the assembly served and voted

The centuries were ranked on the bases of class and each one cast a vote

Plebes were barred from all political and religious offices in the early republic

For 200 years plebes fought the “struggle of the orders” for political, social, and legal equality with the patricians

Plebes made up a large part of the army and were able to use their position in the army as leverage by refusing to fight unless the patricians gave them concessions

They succeeded one step at a time

They first won the right to form an assembly of their own

Plebian tribal assembly where they elected tribunes who had the power to protect plebes from abuse by patricians

Tribunes could also veto any action of a magistrate or any bill from the senate or assembly

These rules were codified in 450 BCE

In 445 plebes won the right to marry patricians, but were still barred from many offices

In 367 BCE plebes won the concession that one of the consuls could be of plebian rank

They were eventually allowed to serve as dictators and censors

In 287 BCE plebes secured the passage of a law that made the decisions of the plebian assembly binding on all Romans

These developments did not establish democracy in Rome

They simply allowed for the plebian aristocracy enjoy the same privileges and power as the patrician aristocracy

The effect was the creation of the *nobiles*, the integration of the aristocracies

From 233 to 133 BCE 26 families produced 80% of the consuls, and 10 of those families accounted for almost 50 % of the successful candidates

Since the dominant families were all represented in the Senate, the Senate became the chief deliberative body

The outcome of the struggle of the orders was a republican constitution dominated by a senatorial aristocracy

Roman Expansion and Imperialism

After the birth of the Roman Republic in 509 BCE, a coalition of Romans, Latins, and Greeks drove the Etruscans out of Latium

In 392 BCE, the Etruscan city of Veii was conquered, and Rome doubled its territory expanding to the north

Rome used inducements and threats to expand their influence and military strength

If enemies could be negotiated with and turned into allies, their soldiers were added to Rome’s army

If not, they were warred upon and if defeated their land was annexed and distributed to poor Romans

One of the effects of the siege of Veii was that soldiers were kept from their farms and so had to be paid for their service

This pleased the poor and improved the quality of the Roman army

In 387 BCE the Romans suffered from a serious setback when the Gauls from northern Italy defeated the Roman army and burned Rome

Romans had to pay a ransom to obtain the return of the city from the Gauls

In 340 BCE Rome’s Latin neighbors formed a league to block its expansion (Latin League)

Rome defeated the league in 338 BCE and they established some precedents for the reorganization of Italy

The Romans did not destroy the cities of the Latin League

Some were given citizenship and others were granted municipal privileges

Self-government

Intermarriage with Romans

They couldn’t take part in Roman politics unless they moved to Rome and applied for Roman citizenship

All allies supplied troops to serve in Rome’s army, but they didn’t pay taxes to Rome

The Romans planted colonies of veteran soldiers on the land they annexed where they served as a permanent garrison to deter rebellion

A network of roads was built to connect the colonies to Rome and to facilitate the transportation of the Roman army to rebellious hotspots

This strategy ultimately led to the Roman dominance of Italy

Although Rome was harsh on enemies, they were generous to those who submitted to their authority

Loyal allies could improve their quality of life and standard of living and they could even achieve full Roman citizenship

This cultivated a strong loyalty to Rome that remained strong when put to the test.

After the conquest of the Latin League, the Romans conquered the Samnites to the south

The expansion to the south brought Rome into direct contact with the Greek cities of southern Italy

When Rome intervened in a quarrel between two Greek cities, Pyrrhus, king of Epirus, defeated the Romans twice

However, he suffered so many casualties that he withdrew from fighting against the Romans

Hence the term pyrrhic victory

Pyrrhus’ withdrawal left the Greeks with no choice but to join the Roman confederation

By 265 BCE Rome ruled all of Italy south of the Po River in northern Italy

Another effect of the defeat of Pyrrhus was the international recognition of Rome as a major power in the Hellenistic world

Carthaginian or Punic Wars

In the late 9th century BCE the Phoenicians established a colony on the African coast called Carthage (New City) near Tunis

In the 6th century Carthage extended along the coast of Africa to the west and east

They also expanded into the Mediterranean in parts of Spain, Sardinia, Corsica, Malta, the Balearic Islands, and western Sicily

The citizens of these regions paid tribute to Carthage and served in the Carthaginian army and navy

Carthage claimed exclusive rights to trade throughout the western Mediterranean

Rome and Carthage became entangled in a dispute in Sicily

The Greek tyrant Hiero of Syracuse attacked the Sicilian city of Messana which commanded the straits between Sicily and Italy

Italians known as Mamertines (Sons of Mars) had seized the city and Hiero wanted them out

The Mamertines asked Carthage to help them defend against Hiero and they agreed

However, they also asked Rome for help to act as a check on the Carthaginians

The Romans realized that if they didn’t intervene, then they would be conceding the straits to Carthage

In 264 BCE the Roman assembly voted to send a army to Messana

The First Punic War, 264-241 BCE (Poeni or Puni is Latin for Phoenician)

The Romans only made headway against the Carthaginians after they built a fleet and blockaded the Carthaginian ports in western Sicily

After a long war of attrition Carthage capitulated surrendering Sicily and the islands between Sicily and Rome to the Romans and paid them an indemnity

After rebellions against Carthage on Sardinia and Corsica in 238 BCE, the Romans seized those islands and force Carthage to pay another indemnity

This was the provocative action that sparked the Second Punic War

The Second Punic War (218-202 BCE)

There are questions as to why Rome sought to acquire more territory since the administration of lands outside of Italy created serious problems

Sicily, Corsica, and Sardinia became the first provinces in a Roman Empire

Rome turned the provinces over to military governors and did not offer citizenship or an alliance to those provinces

The subjects of these provinces either served in the Roman army or paid tribute

Rome gathered the tribute by allowing the highest bidder to manage the provinces and collect the tribute

The provinces became a source of corruption undermining the machinery of the Republic

Meanwhile in Spain, Hamilcar Barca, the Carthaginian governor sought to build a Punic empire in Spain to make up for the territorial losses to Rome

Under the leadership of Hasdrubal, son-in-law of Hamilcar, the Carthaginians continued to expand their influence in Spain

The Romans became alarmed and imposed a treaty where the Carthaginians agreed not to expand north of the Ebro River

Hasdrubal assumed that he had free reign south of the river

However, the Romans violated the spirit of the treaty by establishing an alliance with the city of Saguntum south of the Ebro

Hasdrubal was assassinated in 221 BCE and Hannibal, 25 yo son of Hamilcar, succeeded him

Hannibal began to extend the Carthaginian empire in Spain without regard to the treaty

When the Saguntines began to cause problems for Hannibal he besieged and captured the town

The Romans sent an ultimatum demanding Hannibal’s surrender

Carthage refused and Rome declared war in 218 BCE

Rome had done nothing to protect itself from Carthaginian attack and Hannibal was able to cross the Alps into Italy with Gallic reinforcements

He imposed serious defeats on the Romans at the Ticinus and Trebia rivers, and crushed the joint consular armies at Lake Trasimene in 217 BCE

Hannibal could not take Rome and he had very little success persuading Rome’s Italian allies to abandon their relationship with the city

In response to the defeats the Romans chose a dictator, Quintas Fabias Maximus

His plan was to avoid direct contact with Hannibal and wear him down by harassing his supply lines and flanks

When Hannibal attacked a grain depot a Cannae, the Romans abandoned this strategy and found themselves in a trap

80,000 Roman soldiers were killed

For the next decade no Roman dared to confront Hannibal directly

Hannibal unfortunately had neither the supplies nor the means to successfully blockade walled cities or to storm them

The Romans simply refused to fight

Hannibal eventually had to cease campaigning

The Romans devised a plan to defeat Hannibal outside of Italy

Publius Cornelius Scipio set out to conquer Spain and cut Hannibal from reinforcements from there

Within a few years he had taken Spain and got permission to open a front in Africa

When Scipio landed in Africa and defeated Carthage, he forced Hannibal to leave Italy and in 202 BCE Hannibal met Scipio at Zama and was defeated when Hannibal’s mercenaries deserted him

Carthage was reduced to a dependent ally

Conquest of the Hellenistic World

In the middle of the 3rd century BCE the balance of power between the Hellenistic kingdoms was threatened by Philip V of Macedon and Antiochus III, the Seleucid ruler as they threatened to expand their domains

Philip had sided with Carthage in the Second Punic War thereby provoking Rome to stir up conflict with Macedon in the Aegean in the Frist Macedonian War 215-205 BCE

After Rome demanded that Philip withdraw from Greece and Philip refused in 200 BCE, Rome declared war and the Second Macedonian War commenced

The Roman general Flaminius defeated Philip in Thessaly and restored the autonomy of the Greek city-states and removed all Roman armies

When Antiochus advanced on the pretext of driving the Romans out of Greece, he was defeated by the Romans in Asia Minor in 189 BCE

Although the Romans didn’t annex any territory, they treated Greece and Asia Minor as protectorates where they freely intervened

When Perseus, the successor of Philip V, began to become popular with revolutionary factions in the Greek city-states, the Romans became convinced that he was a threat to the stability of the Aegean

This led to the 3rd Macedonian War (172-168) and a much harsher Roman policy

After defeating Macedonia a third time, Rome divided the region into four separate republics and forbid any of the citizens of the republics to intermarry or do business with one another

The anti-Roman factions in the Greek city-states were punished severely

So much booty was brought back to Rome that some taxes on its citizenry were abolished

Rome discovered that foreign campaigns could be wildly profitable

Third Punic War (149-146 BCE)

Carthage had followed the terms of the treaty it had signed with Rome after the defeat of Hannibal

But fear, suspicion, and hatred against Carthage was so ingrained in the Romans that Cato, and important censor, is said to have ended all his speeches with the line “that Carthage must be destroyed”

In 146 BCE the Romans took advantage of a technical breach of the treaty and declared war and Scipio Amilianus destroyed the city

The Character of Roman Society

Roman contact with the Hellenized east had an impact on the development of Roman society

Contact with the Greeks especially had great influence in Rome

The education of the Roman elite became bilingual and the youth studied Greek rhetoric, literature, and philosophy

The Greek language helped refine the Latin language and Greek literature helped inspire the birth of Latin literature

In religion, the Romans worked Greek mythology into their own traditions

New eastern cults like the worship of Cybele, the mother goddess of Phrygia were becoming more popular

But conservative Romans were outraged by some of these developments and banned the worship of eastern deities like Dionysus

However, this shows that Romans were open to learning and copying eastern religions

In education Roman curriculum was designed to elevate moral standards and to inspire respect for Roman traditions

Boys were taught to read, write, calculate, farm, religious rites, Roman history, and trained for military service

Greek teachers taught Romans in the study of what the Romans called *humanitas*, the study of language, literature, rhetoric and philosophy

Some Roman conservatives that Greek influence in education would weaken Roman traditions

In the late Republic Roman education became more formal and organized

From age 7 to 12 boys went to elementary school accompanied by a Greek slave called a *paedagogus*, who looked after the boys and helped them learn Greek by speaking to them in that language

From 12 to 16 they studied Greek and Latin literature with a *grammaticus* (someone who knows one’s letters) who taught dialectic, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music, and some rhetoric

Girls seem to have received an equivalent to boys education in the early stages

They were taught by private tutors

They didn’t receive later education because they were usually married by that age

However, some women continued their education, and some were known for their learning and prose

Slavery

Romans always had slaves, but it was in the 2nd century BCE, in the wake of Roman conquests, when slaves became fundamental to Roman life

From 264 to 133 BCE the Romans enslaved 250,000 prisoners of war

Slaves could marry and their children increased the slave population

Caste system

Slaves could purchase their freedom and Romans often freed their slaves

After some time, there emerged a considerable population consisting of people whose ancestors had been slaves

Romans transported slaves from all over the Mediterranean world which had the effect of creating a heterogeneous society

Rome’s unique contribution to slavery was the invention of an agricultural system that employed a vast number of slaves

At the end of the Republic there were 2 to 3 million slaves in Italy which was 35 to 40 percent of the total population

Most slaves belonged to estates or plantations called *latifundias*

These estates produced cash crops such as wine, olive oil, cattle, and wool

Of course, harsh treatment led to slave rebellions

A rebellion in Sicily in 134 BCE lasted 2 years

In 73 BCE Spartacus, a gladiator, raised an army of 70,000 slaves and routinely defeated Roman legions

When Spartacus was defeated 6,000 of his men were crucified and displayed on the road from Capua to Rome

The Fall of the Republic

Rome expanded as an effect of defensive or preventative wars

Roman policy was to provide security for Rome on Rome’s terms

The empire that was the effect of this informal policy ultimately undercut the republic it was meant to protect

The Roman constitution had developed in relation to the Roman city-state

It was not suitable to handle the responsibilities of an empire

The Punic wars changed Roman society by severely disruption the agricultural economy to the point that soldiers returning from war could not afford to get their devastated farms back into production

Displaced farmers moved to the cities and became wage earners or became tenant farmers or hired hands

Abandoned land was available for the taking by those who had the capital and means to convert the lands into estates producing cash crops

These developments created greater inequalities among Romans

Social tensions developed and threatened the survival of the republic

Like Athens

In the middle of the 2nd century Roman nobles were aware of the collapse of institutions that were fundamental to the republic

The decline of the peasant farmer weakened the Roman army and disrupted the patron-client relationship

Patrons found it hard to control clients once they were no longer tied to their lands

The introduction of the secret ballot in the 130s BCE also weakened the ties of clientage

In 133 BCE Tiberius Gracchus, a tribune, tried to solve these problems by proposing a program of land reform

The state would take over most of the lands that were held illegally and would redistribute it in small lots at low rent, and the farms were not allowed to be sold

This received great opposition and was vetoed by one of the fellow tribunes, M. Octavius

Gracchus then opted to undercut the checks and balances of Rome’s constitution

He persuaded the assembly to remove the veto by removing Octavius from office

At this point Gracchus’ senatorial allies abandoned him

When Gracchus gave up on convincing the senate for support, he proposed an even harsher bill that sought to go around the senate’s traditional control of finances and foreign affairs

He proposed to use revenue from the acquisition of foreign territories as a means to fund the land distribution

When he announced his candidacy for reelection of tribunal, he violated another custom and some feared that he was trying to establish himself as a tyrant

At the elections a riot broke out and Gracchus and 300 of his supporters were killed

Traditions will defend themselves

This was the first internal bloodshed in Rome’s political history

This episode led to a new political situation in Rome

Despite his failure, Gracchus had shown how the tribune could be used to challenge senatorial dominance

Gracchus had shown what the Greek tyrants had learned

That a leader could acquire power by appealing directly to the people with a popular issue

Politicians that employed this strategy became known as *populares*

Their opponents that defended the traditional prerogatives of the senate became known as *optimates* (the best men)

These factions represented strategies and alliances for winning and holding political power

10 years after the death of Tiberius, his brother Gaius Gracchus became tribune and revived the efforts to redistribute public land

He also pitted the senatorial and equestrian castes against one another by allowing equestrians to serve on the courts that tried provincial governors

He also proposed a law in 122 BCE that would give Rome’s Italian allies Roman citizenship

Traditional Romans didn’t want to dilute Roman votes with more citizens

When Gaius lost reelection in 121 BCE he was tried by the Senate and was killed along with 3,000 of his followers

Gaius’ death taught the *populares* that they would have to resort to violence to check the violence of the senate

In 107 BCE the Roman assembly elected C. Marius to the consulship and commissioned him to control foreign policy usurping the right of the senate to control this area

Marius was commissioned to deal with foreign wars in Africa and on the northern frontier

The long struggle against these threats kept Marius in office for 5 consecutive terms

He won battles because he was able to convince the Romans to keep larger armies in the field

He got the property qualification of military service dropped

Marius’ reforms built a strong army but they altered the balance of power

Marius’ army were professional clients of their general

They were dependent on him for their pay and land grants

They identified with Marius more than the state

Marius was able to use his army to frighten the senate into giving him whatever he needed to keep his men happy

Marius’ example inspired imitation

Learning and copying

Example of selfish interest

L. Cornelius Sulla was an aristocrat that served under Marius

Sulla was a leader in the war in 90 BCE to deal with insurgent Italian allies

His performance in the war brought him the consulship in 88 BCE and a command in a war in Asia Minor

When Marius, age 70, demanded the commission, Sulla let loose his army upon Rome itself

Marius used the army as leverage, whereas Sulla used direct force

Sulla regained his command and finished the war in Asia Minor in 83 BCE

When he returned to Rome, he forced Marius’ supporters from Italy and assumed dictatorial powers

His first step from there was to wipe out his opponents

He confiscated their property and gave it to his supporters

Sulla ultimately saw himself as a savior of Rome’s republic

He sought to restore traditional senatorial government

The senate’s political privileges were reaffirmed, and the powers of the tribune were curtailed

Sulla retired in 79 BCE declaring his work as complete

These developments however led to civil war

Within a year of Sulla’s death in 78 BCE, the senate began making exceptions to the rules Sulla had set up to safeguard its powers

The senate learned that the way to deal with emergencies was to create special commands that were free of constitutional limitations

The senate gave a command to a general named Pompey to deal with a special crisis in Spain, and then later, along with Marcus Licinius Crassus a wealthy senator, to put down the Spartacus rebellion

Pompey and Crassus used their influence to repeal most of Sulla’s reforms so that generals and tribunes could undercut the senate by directly appealing to the people

Pompey was given the imperium to deal with pirates in the Mediterranean, and to deal with military crises in Asia Minor

When Pompey returned to Rome in 62 BCE he had consolidated more power than anyone in Roman history

The senate feared that he would copy Sulla and create a dictatorship

Crassus sought to preserve his power by allying himself with Gaius Julius Caesar and descendant of a patrician family with connections to the *populares*

His aunt was Marius’ wife

Caesar could rally the *populares* to the cause of Crassus

When Pompey returned to Rome in 62 BCE he thought the senate would grant his requests for the distribution of land to his men

They refused and that forced Pompey to join with his enemies Crassus and Caesar

They joined in an informal arrangement called the First Triumverate

And by working together they could control the public

Caesar was elected to the consulship in 59 BCE

He used the office to give each triumvirate what they wanted

Pompey got land for his soldiers and confirmation for his treaties

Crassus won tax concessions for his equestrian supporters

Caesar got a special military command to rival Pompey’s

With this command Caesar conquered Gaul and acquired fame and power he needed to compete against Pompey

The Triumvirate dissolved when Crassus was killed in battle in Persia

In the late 50s BCE the senate appointed Pompey as sole consul, concluding that Caesar was more of a threat to its power

The senate hoped to work with Pompey to bring down Caesar

The senate refused to extend Caesar’s commission in Gaul and in 49 BCE, they ordered Caesar to lay down his arms and command

He understood that this mean either his exile from Rome or his death

Caesar chose to defy the authority of the senate and ordered his legions to cross the Rubicon River and attack Rome

Civil War ensued and Caesar was victorious in 45 BCE

Caesar made few changes, but he packed the senate with his supporters

He monopolized military power and was appointed dictator for 10 years, and then for life a year later

Caesars enemies concluded that Caesar was seeking to create a monarchy and they conspired against him to assassinate him

Caesar was assassinated on March 15, 44 BCE

The senatorial assassins believed that the republic would be restored with the death of Caesar

Instead the assassination set off 13 more years of civil war and doomed the republic

The Second Triumvirate and the emergence of Octavian

Caesar had designated his 18-year-old grandnephew Gaius Octavian as his heir

The Senate supported Octavian in hopes to block Mark Antony, Caesar’s second-in-command from taking power

Antony had the support of the soldiers who maintained their loyalty to Caesar

Octavian, however, broke from the Senate and marched on Rome and assumed the consulship in 43 BCE and declared war on Caesar’s assassins

Octavian joined with Antony and another of Caesar’s generals Aemilius Lepidus and created the dictatorship of Second Triumvirate with the ostensible aim of restoring the republic

In 42 the triumvirate defeated the assassins Brutus and Cassius in Macedonia and each of the victors took command over different sections of Roman controlled territory

Lepidus took Africa

Octavian took the West

He had to deal with a war with a son of Pompey

Antony took the East

This was the wealthiest region and Antony sought to expand his domain at the expense of the Parthian empire

Antony suffered a disastrous defeat in 36 BCE and was defeated in 31 BCE by Octavian in western Greece

Octavian had already dispatched Lepidus

The suicide of Antony and Cleopatra ended the civil war and left Octavian in control of all of the Roman armies and the empire at the age of 32

The Augustan Principate

With the disposal of his rivals, the control of the army, and the confiscation of the treasury of Egypt, Octavian had the power to restore stability to Rome

He understood that that it would be dangerous to appear to threaten Roman republican traditions

Slowly and deliberately Octavian established a constitution that would be acceptable to the Romans and capable of managing an empire

This development ultimately contributed to an era of order and stability called the *pax Romana*

Basically, Octavian created a monarchy although it had the trappings of a republic where power was shared with the Senate

All power military and civil power resided in the person of Octavian

He tried to disguise this reality by calling himself *princeps* or “first citizen” or *imperator* or “commander-in-chief”

Octavian violated Roman tradition by holding consecutive consulships and in a gesture to restore the republic he resigned most of his offices with the exception of the governorships of Spain, Gaul, and Syria

20 of 26 legions were located in those provinces

The Senate interpreted this as an act of self-sacrifice and a restoration of the republic and conferred the title of Augustus “revered” upon him

Augustus made another republican gesture when he resigned the consulship

From this point on, Augustus’ power was based on his proconsular *imperium maius* (supreme military command) and the privileges of an honorary tribune

The Romans accepted Augustus’ leadership because they benefitted from his administration

He weeded out inefficient and corrupt magistrates

He blocked ambitious politicians and generals

He eased tensions among the castes and the citizens of the provinces

He also brought about rapid economic development

The Senate became less of a parochial or exclusive institution as Augustus manipulated the political situation and engineered a Senate made up of talented members with no connection to the old Roman aristocracy

He appeased the masses by creating a fire department and police force

Organizing a grain distribution program to benefit the poor

Set up an office that oversaw water supply

And used the public treasury to create numerous public works

The provinces also benefitted from Augustus’ rule

Rome now had power to control the conduct of administrators in the provinces

Good governors were appointed and those who abused their power were punished

The provincials were also granted a greater degree of political autonomy

The military was professionalized, and its numbers were reduced

About 300,000 men

Legions were recruited from Italians, but auxiliary companies made up of provincials were created

Armies were permanently stationed in the provinces and helped bring Roman culture and traditions to the provinces

Soldiers intermarried with the provincial population and established new settlements

Socially Augustus devised a program to restore traditional family values and religion

Laws were passed to curb adultery and divorce and to encourage early marriage and promoted large families

Augustus’ own behavior set the example when he banished his only child, Julia, to punish her for her flagrant immorality

He worked to restore Roman religion by building many temples, reviving old cults, reinvigorating the priestly colleges, and banned the worship of some foreign deities

Imperial Rome 14-180 CE

Augustus was succeeded by his stepson, Tiberius

By this time Romans had come to accept the new order and the terms imperator and Caesar began to be used for those who were associated with Caesar’s lineage and with the military power to rule the Roman world

Tiberius was followed by Gaius Caligula (37-41) and he was succeeded by Claudius (41-54), who left the throne to his stepson Nero (54-68)

Nero committed suicide when a rebellion in Gaul convinced him that he lost control of the army

Nero was the last of the descendants of Augustus and his wife Livia

Instability emerged in Rome as four different armies marched on Rome in succession from 69-96 establishing four different emperors during this time

Vespasian (69-79) and his sons Titus (79-81) and Domitian (81-96) made up the Flavian dynasty

Vespasian was the first who had no connection to the old Roman nobility

Domitian left no heirs after he was assassinated in response to his increasingly tyrannical behavior

The assassins of Domitian appealed to the Senate to appoint an emperor

The Senate elected the senator Nerva (96-98) the first of the so-called “good emperors”

Trajan succeeded Nerva (98-117)

Hadrian (117-138)

Antoninus Pius (138-161)

Marcus Aurelius (161-180)

None of these emperors had a son to succeed them, so each adopted an heir following the behavior set by Nerva

The effect of this system of succession guaranteed that worthy leaders were promoted to power and it produced a century of peaceful competent government

This system ended when Marcus Aurelius allowed his inept son Commodus be his heir to the throne

Administration of the empire

The imperial government was largely staffed by professional career bureaucrats

The provinces especially benefitted from a professionalized imperial government

They enjoyed stable government and the economic advantages of being part of a geographically large centralized system

Rome unified the empire by respecting the customs and traditions of the provinces

By 212 Roman citizenship had been extended to almost every inhabitant of the empire

The spread of *Romanitas* led to senators and emperors being chosen from provincial families

Administratively the empire was structured as a federation of cities and towns

Typical cities were 20,000

Only 3 had more than 75,000

Rome perhaps had over a million

The central government dealt with city governments and had little to do with those who lived in the countryside

Municipal charters left much responsibility to local councils and magistrates

This brought the provincial elites into the structure of Roman government and helped spread Roman traditions in those areas

This policy was mostly successful in encouraging assimilation

However, the example of the Jews and Egyptians saw the resistance to assimilation on religious and traditional grounds

The emperors often took concern and responsibility for the welfare of their subjects in the municipalities

They established programs of public assistance

The *alimenta* providing assistance for children of indigent parents

They would send administrators to areas to help with financial and other problems

One effect of this growing concern of the emperors with the condition of the municipalities and provinces was the erosion of local autonomy which began to undermine the local government’s vitality and willingness to manage their own affairs

Foreign Policy

The emperors prior to Trajan maintained a defensive foreign policy maintaining the frontiers

Trajan was the first to take to the offensive when he crossed the Danube frontier and conquered Dacia in an effort to push back aggressive barbarian tribes

He also invaded the Parthian Empire and expanded the empire eastward to Armenia, Assyria, and Mesopotamia (113-117)

These efforts led to the eastward overextension of Roman power and Trajan was forced to retreat

He died on the way back to Rome

Hadrian established a new defensive strategy by building walls along the British and Danube frontiers

This defensive strategy eventually became rigid and the Romans under Aurelius had to spend most of their time fending off attacks in the east and along the Danube River

Agriculture and the decline of slavery

As large estates growing cash crops came to dominate Roman agriculture, small scale farmers were forced into tenant farming and became known as *coloni*

As more and more farmers became *coloni*, slaves steadily became replaced as the foundation for agricultural labor

The *coloni* were sharecroppers who paid rent in cash, labor, or with their crops

Ultimately their movements were restricted to prevent them from leaving the farms and they became tied to the lands that they worked

This seems to be a precursor to feudalism

Although slavery dramatically declined it continued to exist until the end of the empire

Christianity

Christianity was one of the most important developments of the imperial era

Based on the teachings of Jesus who was born in Judaea during Augustus’ reign

He followed in the tradition of the Jewish prophets and gained a considerable following accepting him as a messiah or anointed as God’s messenger (Greek: *christos*)

This provoked the hostility of the Jewish religious authorities and the Roman governor was convinced that he threatened the peace and ordered his execution

The most important missionary that founded the Christian church was Paul (Saul) a Jewish Roman citizen from Tarsus in Asia Minor around 35 CE

The initial question was the status of Christianity in relation to Judaism

James, brother of Jesus, adhered to the idea that it was another version of Judaism

Less traditional Hellenized Jews insisted that Christianity was a new universal religion

Paul had success making converts from gentiles or non-Jews and greatly promoted the missionary nature of the sect

He established Christian theology and encouraged followers to spread the religion

The emphasis on love and charity, and the emphasis on the needs of the week, sick, and unprotected magnified its appeal and led it to spread throughout the Roman empire

Extended social behavior

The early Church had little organization

The need to support missionary activities prompted churches to organize councils of elders (presbyters) and deacons (servers) and eventually bishops (Greek: *episkopos* for overseer) to coordinate activities

It was accepted that the powers Jesus gave the original disciples were passed on to the church from one generation of bishops to another

Apostolic succession (metaphorical descent and inheritance)

Although Romans initially saw Christianity as a part of Judaism, they became alarmed at the missionary zeal of the Christians

This was troubling because Christians (and Jews) taught to be hostile to Roman traditions and proclaimed an imminent end to the Roman world

The development of internal disputes about the correct expression of faith appeared among Christians

The mainstream majority of the practitioners became associated with a catholic or universal position, while those minorities who differed were labeled heretics essentially meaning “those who held unique positions”

By the end of the 2nd century the Church agreed upon a standard collection of holy writings, creeds, and statements of faith

During this time the bishop of Rome began to lay claim of primacy or highest rank of all the bishops

Rome was the capital of the empire and had the largest concentrated population of Christians

And it happened to be the place the two most important missionaries Peter and Paul was martyred

Peter is claimed to have been the first bishop in Rome

By the 3rd century the pressures on Rome’s frontiers were serious

In the east the Sassanians made deep inroads into Rome’s provinces

They even captured and imprisoned the Roman emperor Valerian in 260

In the west and north were Germanic tribes appearing in greater numbers

The most aggressive were the Goths

To meet the threat of the Sassanians and the Goths along the Danube, the Romans transferred soldiers from their western armies to the east

This move weakened the defenses of the West and made it easy for the Germanic Franks and Alemanni to cross the Roman frontier

Rome also suffered from a manpower shortage as a plague stuck the empire

Aurelius had to resort to conscription of slaves and barbarians

By the 2nd century the Roman army was made up mostly of Romanize provincials and the discipline and training began to decline

The barbarian attacks also brought on a financial crisis

Inflation and the need to pay the soldiers higher wages led to greater taxation

These conditions contributed to piracy, crime, and the neglect of roads and harbors

These conditions hampered trade and commerce

Over taxation depleted the capital needed for business and production

The manpower shortage also contributed to a drop in agricultural

Production

More and more the government compelled its citizens to provide the things that were needed to sustain the armies

These conditions led to the increased militarization of the state

Freedom and private initiative became stifled

A new rigid caste system began to emerge

The emperor Septimius Severus drew a sharp line between the *honestiores* (senators, equestrians, municipal aristocrats, and all soldiers) and the *humiliores*

The *honestiores* enjoyed special legal privileges like lighter punishments for crimes, immunity from torture, and rights to appeal to the emperor

Peasants were tied to their lands, and others were tied to their professions by inheritance

In 235 the death of emperor Alexander Serverus brought on half a century of internal anarchy that invited foreign invasion

During this time the Roman army had to resort to recruiting and maintain armies made up of foreign mercenaries which they essentially hired to protect them

At the beginning of the 4th century there was an effort to restore the empire

Diocletian (284-305) realizing that the defense of the empire was too great for the administration of one person, divided the empire into fourths

Thrace, Asia, and Egypt

Diocletian

Italy, Africa, and Spain

Maximian

Danube-Balkans

Galerias

Britain and Gaul

Constantius

This established some stability and they worked out a means to orderly succession to the throne, but when Diocletian wished to retire and Constantius died there was a question of succession

Constantius’ son Constantine claimed his father’s throne and five others made claims to the throne

Constantine defeated his rivals and made himself sole emperor

All of these difficulties encouraged a drift to total military mobilization, rule by decree without any exercise of popular government, and self-appointment to high offices

The leaders protected themselves from assassination by removing themselves from the people

They became less approachable and were surrounded by elaborate courts

The emperor’s new title became *dominus* or “lord” and they asserted a claim that their authority derived not from the people but from the gods

Constantine had converted to Christianity and became the patron of the church (312)

He moved the capital to Byzantium and dedicated it a Constantinople in 330

Constantine’s death in 337 led to a power struggle among his sons which contributed to more decline as a result of pressure Germanic barbarians

Constantine’s division of the empire into eastern and western sections brought about a decline in the west

Urban civilization in the west eroded and the institution of the fortified country estate or the villa became the foundation for western society

As the aristocracy moved to the country and dominated the villa and its rural *coloni* inhabitants the central government lost its ability to assert its authority

This hastened the decline of trade and communication, depressed the standard of living, and forced regions to become self-sufficient

The west dissolved into isolated estates belonging to rural aristocrats who dominated the majority population of dependent labor

Only Christianity kept alive any traditional memory of imperial unity

The loss of the west allowed Constantinople to concentrate on its own affairs

They diverted the barbarian pressure to the west and eastern cities continued to prosper, and government retained its power