

OVERVIEW OF ANCIENT ROME

The Roman Roots of Western Culture—The Roman civilization which first arose over twenty-five hundred years ago in central Italy is one of the longest lasting and most fascinating civilizations in human history. It is proper to give Ancient Greece the credit for first establishing many of our most cherished western institutions, but it was Rome which assimilated these ideas and made them into bedrock of Western Culture. The middle ages are often considered to be an age of relative ignorance and superstition but the Roman civilization that pre-dated it was astonishingly sophisticated and in many ways eerily similar to our own.

In addition to preserving and building upon Greek ideas of art and literature, philosophy, theatre, and political freedom, Rome made many of its own invaluable contributions to western civilization. Roman engineering of roads, aqueducts, canals, bridges, buildings, baths, sewer systems and fortifications was on a scale unprecedented in human history. The Roman civil service and legal system was developed so that Roman citizens in far flung provinces could be assured that they would be treated fairly and protected from arbitrary judgments. The Empire even extended the benefits of citizenship to leaders of the conquered territories so that they could govern on equal footing with native Romans.

The Latin language evolved to become a universal language of trade and government throughout Western Europe and was the basis for many modern European languages. The Roman legions that were created to protect the borders of Roman territory served not only as border guards, but as policemen and officers of public works. Finally the Pax Romana, or Roman Peace allowed imperial civilization to flourish in terms of trade, commerce, arts, and engineering for hundreds of years without substantial interruption.

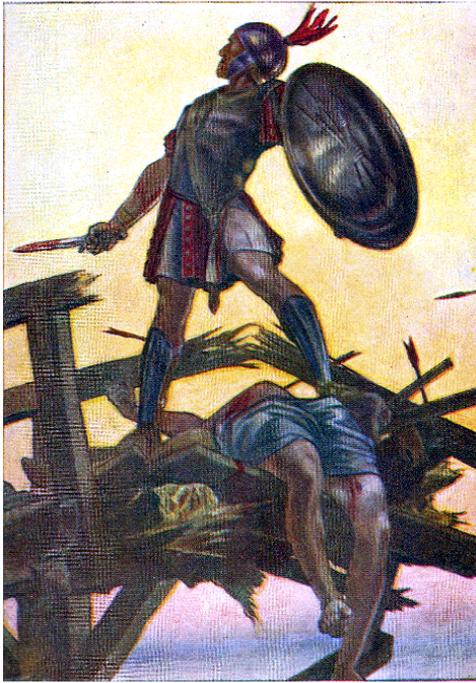
Notwithstanding the numerous civil wars and border skirmishes of the Imperial age, the long-term peace and security afforded by the Roman government was unprecedented in human history.

Divisions of Roman History—The history of Rome began in 753 B. C. when the city was founded by Romulus and Remus, favored sons of Mars. The end of Roman history is harder to pinpoint but is often given as 476 A.D. when a barbarian king became ruler of Italy. During these twelve centuries the Roman government evolved from a Kingdom to a Republic and finally to an Empire, while its territory expanded from a single village in central Italy to encompass all of Northern Africa, Western Europe, and the Middle East.

The **Kingdom of Rome** [753-510 B.C.], during which Roma was ruled by seven kings, lasted for over 200 years. During this legendary period many iconic landmarks of Rome were built and many memorable events became part of Roman folklore. Among these famous incidents were the kidnapping of the Sabine women, the building of the Temple of Jupiter and the acquisition of the Sibylline Books. The Kingdom came to an end when the abusive king Tarquin Superbus was exiled, and the citizens resolved to have no more kings. The Republic era which followed lasted for over five hundred years is undoubtedly the most Romantic period of Roman history.



THE TRIUMPH OF POMPEY



ROMAN SOLDIER VICTORIOUS

During the **Early years of the Republic** [510-275 B.C.], Rome was little more than a village, surrounded by hostile enemies, and scarcely able to defend itself against its own exiled king. Most of the heroes from this period, including Cincinnatus, Coriolanus, and Camillus, led Rome during wars against neighboring tribes and villages, but even during this era Rome's characteristic virtues of courage, loyalty, and industry were apparent. It took over 200 years for Rome to grow from the leading town in the region of Latium to dominion of the Italian peninsula, but by 275 B.C., all of Italy was in alliance with Rome either by affinity or by force.

Once Rome became master of Italy she had to contend with Carthage, the other great power in the Western Mediterranean. The Phoenicians, who founded Carthage in the 9th century B.C., had dominated trade in the region for five hundred years, and in order to compete with her Rome had to become a naval power. For over 100 years, Rome fought an epic war against Carthage for domination of the west, and when she finally prevailed, she was master of all the Mediterranean. The **Punic Wars** [275-146 B.C.] ended

in 146 and for the next 100 years, Rome prospered materially, but declined politically. The Republican government that had sustained Rome through the Punic Wars was strengthened by conflict and adversity, but corrupted by wealth.

The **Decline of the Republic** [146-60 B.C.] and the establishment of an empire in its place was not a sudden occurrence, but rather a gradual process. The territory controlled by Rome by the first century B.C. was simply too vast to be governed by a senate where accountability was dispersed and luxury had dissipated the high standards of conduct once exhibited by Roman statesmen. The **Civil War of Marius and Sulla**, the first triumvirate, and finally the **Caesarean Civil War** broke down the old senatorial system beyond repair and the Republican ideal of Roman government gave way to the Imperial Era.

A great deal of the long term success of the Imperial Roman government over time was due to the reforms made during the early years of the empire, or the **Age of the Caesars** [60 B.C – 14 A.D.]. This division of responsibility allowed the Senate to save face, by retaining control of the "peaceful" provinces, while the emperor controlled the troublesome provinces, where border wars or rebellions might be expected. In effect, this gave the emperor control of the vast majority of the legions. It also gave him control of most of the richest provinces, and even more importantly, nearly complete control of the military. The **Height of the Empire** [14 – 235 A.D.] was during the 2nd century A.D., empire was so well organized and the military structure that upheld it was so resilient that the empire survived for over 200 years, even after imperial leadership fell into chaos and Rome began its long decline.

By the 5th century A.D. the long delayed **Fall of the Empire** [235 to 565 A.D.] began in earnest. Much Roman territory was overtaken by barbarian leaders and the central government lost all influence. The process was gradual however, and most of the Germanic leaders who came to govern former Roman provinces sought to maintain many aspects of the former government. In later years most men looked back on the peace and prosperity of the Roman Empire as a golden age, and sought to restore its glory. The "Holy Roman Empire", that arose in the Middle Ages was far less imposing than its predecessor, but was at least a testimony to the ideals of the lost civilization.