Ancient Rome

From Republic to Empire
Modern scholars believe that in the 8th century B.C., the inhabitants of some small Latin settlements on hills in the **TIBER VALLEY** united and established a common meeting place, the **FORUM**, around which the city of Rome grew.
THE ROMAN MONARCHY to 509 B.C.

According to tradition, early Rome was ruled by KINGS elected by the people.

- The king's executive power was conferred by a POPULAR ASSEMBLY made up of all arms-bearing citizens.
- The king turned for advice to a council of nobles, called the SENATE.
- Each senator had lifelong tenure and the members of this group and their families constituted the PATRICIAN class.
- The other class of Romans, the PLEBEIANS (commoners) included small farmers, artisans, and many clients (dependents of patrician landowners). In return for a livelihood, the clients gave their patrician patrons political support in the ASSEMBLY.
ROMAN SENATE
In 509 B.C., according to tradition, the **PATRICIANS** expelled the last Etruscan king and established a **REPUBLIC**.

- The power to rule was transferred to two new officials called **CONSULS**.
- Elected annually from the patrician class, the consul exercised their power in the interests of that class.
Although the **PATRICIANS** controlled the government, they found themselves unable to exist without the plebeians.

The **PLEBEIANS** produced the **FOOD** and supplied the **LABOR** that kept the Roman economy going.

They also supplied the soldiers for the Roman **MILITARY** – especially important since Rome was in continual military conflict during the age of the Republic.
PLEBEIAN STRUGGLE FOR EQUAL RIGHTS

- For more than two centuries following the establishment of the Republic, the plebeians struggled for political and social equality.
  - Outright civil war was averted by the willingness of the patricians to compromise.
  - Much of the plebeians’ success in this struggle was also due to their tactics of collective action and to their having organized a corporate group within the state.
  - The unofficial body was known as the PLEBEIAN COUNCIL.
  - It was presided over by plebeian officials called TRIBUNES, whose job was to safeguard the interests of the plebeians and to negotiate with the consuls and the Senate.
The advancement of the PLEBEIANS during the early Republic took two main lines: the safeguarding of their FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS and the progressive enlargement of their share of POLITICAL POWER.
FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

- Because the consuls often interpreted Rome's unwritten customary law to suit PATRICIAN INTERESTS, the plebeians demanded that it be written down.
  - As a result, about 450 B.C., the law was inscribed on twelve tablets of bronze and set up publicly in the Forum.
  - The LAW OF THE TWELVE TABLETS was the first landmark in the long history of Roman law.
The plebeians in time acquired other fundamental rights and safeguards:

- They secured the right to **APPEAL A DEATH SENTENCE** imposed by a consul and to be retried before the popular assembly.
- The tribunes gained a **VETO POWER** over any legislation or executive act that threatened the rights of the plebeians.
- **MARRIAGE** between patricians and plebeians, prohibited by the Law of the Twelve Tablets, was legalized.
- The enslavement of citizens for **DEBT** was abolished.
POLITICAL POWER

- Little by little, the plebeian class acquired more power in the functioning of government.
  - In 367 B.C., **ONE CONSULSHIP** was reserved for the plebeians.
  - Before the end of the century, they were eligible to hold other important positions: **PRAETOR** (in charge of the law courts), **QUAESTOR** (treasurer), **CENSOR** (supervisor of public morals and state contracts).
  - Some plebeians succeeded in gaining entry to the **SENATE**.
  - The long struggle for equality ended in 287 B.C. when the **PLEBEIAN COUNCIL** was recognized as a constitutional body, henceforth known as the **TRIBAL ASSEMBLY**, with the right to **PASS LAWS** that were binding on all citizens.
  - The Roman Republic was now technically a democracy, although in actual practice a senatorial aristocracy of patricians and rich plebeians continued to control the state.
Ancient Rome had an **AGRICULTURAL, SLAVE-BASED ECONOMY** whose main purpose was to feed the vast number of citizens and legionaries who populated the Mediterranean region.

Agriculture and **TRADE**, were supplemented by small scale **INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION**
When the Romans conquered the Mediterranean, they took millions of **SLAVES** to Italy, where they worked on the large plantations or in the houses and workplaces of wealthy citizens.

The Italian economy depended on abundant slave labor, with slaves constituting **40 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION**. Slaves served as singers, scribes, jewelers, bartenders, and even doctors. One slave trained in medicine was worth the price of 50 agricultural slaves.
The staple crops of Roman farmers in Italy were various **GRAINS, OLIVES, and GRAPES. OLIVE OIL and WINE** were among the most important products in the ancient civilized world and led Italy's exports.
Farmers could give surplus crops to the government in lieu of a monetary tax. This system allowed rulers to gain popularity with the masses through **FREE GRAIN DISTRIBUTION**. Unfortunately it also left farmers with little incentive to increase productivity or output, since more crop translated into more taxes (and more free grain distributions). The need to secure **GRAIN-PRODUCING PROVINCES** was one important factor that led to expansion and conquest.
Improved farming methods learned from the Greeks and Carthaginians encouraged **RICH ARISTOCRATS** to buy more and more land and, abandoning the cultivation of grain, introduce **LARGE-SCALE SCIENTIFIC PRODUCTION** of olive oil and wine, or of sheep and cattle. This trend was especially profitable because an abundance of cheap **SLAVES** from the conquered areas was available to work on the estates. These large slave plantations, called **LATIFUNDIA**, were now common in Italy, while small farms were the exception.
The land problem was further complicated by the government's earlier practice of **leasing** part of the territory acquired in the conquest of the Italian peninsula to anyone willing to pay a percentage of the crop or animals raised on it. Only the patricians or wealthy plebeians could afford to lease large tracts of this **public land** and in time they treated it as their own property. Plebeian protests had led to an attempt to limit the holdings of a single individual to 320 acres, but the law was never enforced.
As a result of expansion, important social and economic problems faced Rome by the middle of the second century B.C. One of the most pressing problems was the **DISAPPEARANCE OF THE SMALL LANDOWNER**. Burdened by frequent military service, his farm buildings destroyed by war, and unable to compete with the cheap grain imported from the new Roman province of Sicily, the **SMALL FARMER SOLD OUT** and moved to Rome. Here he joined the unemployed, discontented **PROLETARIAT**.
Religion played a very important role in the daily life of Ancient Rome. The Romans believed that **gods controlled their lives** and, as a result, spent a great deal of their time worshipping them.

The most important god was **Jupiter**. He was the king of gods who ruled with his wife **Juno**, the goddess of the sky.

Other gods includes **Mars, Mercury, Neptune, Janis, Diana, Vesta, Minerva, Venus**.

After the reign of the **Emperor Augustus** (27 BC to AD 14), the emperor was also considered to be a god and he was worshipped on special occasions.
- **TEMPLES** to worship the gods were built throughout the Roman Empire.
- Each family home would also have a small altar and shrine. The Romans had **PERSONAL HOUSEHOLD GODS** or spirits which were worshipped every day at home. The shrine contained statues of the spirits and the head of the household led family prayers around the shrine each day.
In terms of the arts, Roman citizens were practical people who spent less time on art, literature, and philosophy and more time on **ENGINEERING, CONSTRUCTION, and MILITARY OPERATIONS.**
ENGINEERING PRACTICES

- In designing their bridges and aqueducts, the Romans placed a series of **STONE ARCHES** next to one another to provide mutual support.
- Fourteen **AQUEDUCTS**, stretching a total of 265 miles, supplied some 50 gallons of water daily for each inhabitant of Rome.
- The practical nature of the Romans and their skill and initiative in engineering were demonstrated in the many **DAMS, RESERVOIRS**, and **HARBORS** they built.
The **BARREL VAULT**, basically a series of adjoining arches forming a structure resembling a tunnel, was a new method of enclosing space. In the barrel vault the supports of the arches became heavy masonry walls to bear the weight of the vaulted roof.

The Romans next developed the **CROSS VAULT** by intersection two barrel vaults at right angles.
Another important advance in architecture was the Roman's success in constructing **CONCRETE DOMES** on a large scale. The weight of the dome was transferred directly to the walls and no other support was necessary. The largest of the dome structures was the **PANTHEON** (temple of all the gods).
The standard type of Roman public building was the **BASCILICA**, a colonnaded structure that became a model for early Christian churches. Rows of columns divided the interior into a central nave and side aisles, with the roof over the nave raised to admit light, creating a **CLERESTORY** (an upper portion of a wall containing windows for supplying natural light to a building.)
The Romans developed a distinctive **sculpture** which was realistic, secular, and individualistic. **Equestrian statues** sculpted coffins (**sarcophagi**), and the **reliefs** found on imperial monuments were exceptionally fine works of art. The Romans were particularly skilled in producing floor **mosaics** and in painting **frescoes**. Roman epic, dramatic, and lyric **poetry** forms were usually written in conscious imitation of Greek masterpieces.
The Romans were attracted to two Hellenistic ethical philosophies:

- **EPICURIANISM** taught that the wise man could achieve happiness simply by freeing his body from pain and his mind from fear -- particularly the fear of death. To reach this goal, men must **AVOID BODILY EXCESSES**, including those of pleasure, and accept the scientific teaching of Democritus that both body and soul are composed of atoms which fall apart at death. Thus, **BEYOND DEATH THERE IS NO EXISTENCE** and nothing to fear.

- **STOICISM** argued that **THE UNIVERSE IS CONTROLLED** by some power -- variously called Reason, World Soul, Fortune, and God -- which determines everything that happens. The wise man conforms his will to the World Will and "**STOICALLY" ACCEPTS** whatever part fortune allots him in the drama of life.

  - Stoicism had a humanizing effect on Roman law by introducing such concepts as the **LAW OF NATURE**, the **LAW OF BROTHERHOOD OF MEN** (including slaves), and the view that a man is **INNOCENT UNTIL PROVED GUILTY**.
POLITICAL THEORY AND LEGAL PRINCIPLES

- Roman political thinkers contributed many governmental theories:
  - The **SOCIAL CONTRACT** theory (that government originated as a voluntary agreement among citizens).
  - The idea of **POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY** (that all power ultimately resides with the people).
  - The concept that **LAW** must be the basis for government.
Originally, the wars which the Republic fought were largely **DEFENSIVE WARS**. Soon, however, the Romans were moving to gain control over neighboring territory in order to **NEUTRALIZE THE THREAT OF ATTACK**. Their logic was that control over these territories would **PREVENT POTENTIAL ATTACK** from the people occupying those territories and at the same time provide a buffer region between themselves and potential attackers.
Weakened by civil war, the Roman Republic gave way to the **ROMAN EMPIRE**, with its **AUTOCRATIC** form of government and **LARGE TERRITORIAL HOLDINGS** in Europe and around the Mediterranean.

Several events marked the transition from Republic to Empire, including **JULIUS CAESAR**’s appointment as perpetual **DICTATOR** (44 BC), the victory of **OCTAVIAN** at the Battle of Actium (31 BC), and the Roman Senate's granting to Octavian of the title **AUGUSTUS**. (27 BC).