

Mediterranean Society: The Roman Phase

Chapter 11

Geography

- Geographically, Rome was relatively well-situated. The Alps to the north provided protection from an invasion by land (although, ultimately, not enough). The sea surrounding the Italian peninsula limited the possibility of a naval attack unless a large armada floated across the sea.



Geography

- Yet, although somewhat isolated, Rome was also at a crossroad. It had easy access to northern Africa, Palestine, Greece, and the Iberian Peninsula (modern-day Spain and Portugal), which meant easy access to the rest of the world.



From Kingdom to Republic

- Though Rome began as a small, agricultural city-state, it soon developed into a monarchy, then a republic, and empire, and eventually, the dominant Mediterranean power.

The Etruscans and Rome: The Founding of Rome



- According to ancient legend: Romulus and Remus, twins rescued by a she-wolf; founded Rome in 753 B.C.E.
 - Stories relate that they are the descendants of Aeneas, a surviving Trojan prince
 - The tales say they competed for the right to found the city; Romulus wins and builds his city on seven hills overlooking the Tiber River
- Modern thought: Indo-European migrants crossed the Alps (c. 2000 BCE) because they were attracted by the warm weather, pasturelands, and agricultural valleys.
 - These invaders intermarried and blended with the indigenous Neolithic farmers on the Italian peninsula

The Etruscans and Rome: The Founding of Rome

- The Etruscans dominated Italy from the eighth to fifth centuries B.C.E. (probably migrated to Italy from Anatolia)
- Settled first in Tuscany and built thriving cities throughout the territory they controlled
- They produced fine bronze, iron, gold, and silver products to trade throughout the western Mediterranean.
- The kingdom of Rome was on the Tiber River – Etruscan rule brought paved streets, public buildings, defensive walls, and large temples; trade routes all converged on Rome

Establishment of the Republic

- Rome's nobility overthrew the last Etruscan king in 509 B.C.E. and replaced him with an aristocratic republic
 - Avoided destructive class struggles by establishing a republican form of government
 - Wealthy aristocrats: Patricians
 - Common Roman Citizens: Plebeians
- Built the Roman forum in the center of the city – political and civic center for government business



3D Rendering of the Roman Forum

Establishment of the Republic

- Government Structure:
 - Two executives known as Consuls (elected by the assembly)
 - A Senate (dominated by the aristocrats) advised the consuls and ratified major decisions
 - Two assemblies – one for patricians and one for plebeians
 - Office of the Tribune – made up of ten men whose job it was to speak for the plebeians
 - Office of Dictator – established to make executive decisions in times of crisis (limited to only six months in office)
- Provided a stable government for almost 500 years

ROMAN REPUBLICAN
GOVERNMENT
=
ALL **CITIZENS** HAVE
RIGHT TO VOTE

2 EXECUTIVE
CONSULS

12 STONE
TABLETS IN
FORUM

APPOINTED BY

WRITTEN ON

SENATE

VETO LAWS
MADE BY
SENATE

PEOPLES
ASSEMBLY

REAL
POWER OF
IMPORTANT
DECISIONS

ALWAYS MAINTAIN

MADE UP OF

PATRICIANS/
PATRONS

STRUGGLE FOR
POWER WITH

PLEBEIANS

A.K.A.

TRIBUNE OF
THE PEOPLE

ARE

LAND-OWNING
ARISTOCRACY

PROTECT &
CONTROL

CLIENTS

GETS POWER BY

ARE

COULD NOT

STRIKES &
REFUSALS
TO DO
DUTY

CITIZEN
FARMERS/
TRADERS

HOLD PUBLIC
OFFICE OR
MARRY
PATRICIANS

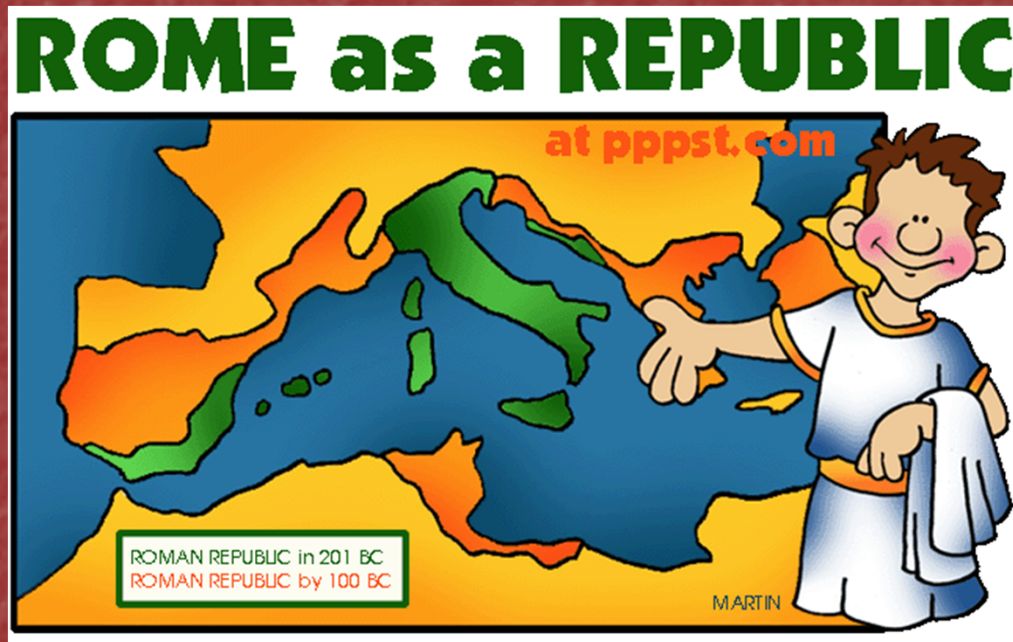
MADE UP OF

ALLOW

POOR/SLAVES/
NEWCOMERS

PATRONS
STATUS AND
INFLUENCE

Expansion of the Republic



- External threats from the Etruscans to the north and the Gauls from the other side of the Alps
- Rome consolidated its position in Italy, fifth and fourth centuries BCE – overtook the Etruscans and gained access to their iron industry

Expansion of the Republic

- Were able to seize the rest of the Italian peninsula because of a military presence in the conquered colonies and a generous policy towards those they conquered
 - Allowed them to trade freely throughout the republic
 - Could govern their own affairs as long as they remained militarily loyal to Rome
 - Could intermarry with Romans
 - Could sometimes gain Roman citizenship
- Conquered peoples provided political, military and diplomatic support for Rome

The Punic Wars



- Conflict soon arose with Carthage (dominant political power in north Africa) and Hellenistic realms
- The Punic Wars – three devastating conflicts with Carthage resulted in Roman victory (burned the city, enslaved 50,000 survivors, gained control of rich grain, oil, wine, silver and gold regions)

The Punic Wars



- First Punic War (263-241 B.C.E.) - fought to gain control of the island of Sicily (Rome won)
- Second Punic War (218 B.C.E.) - Carthaginian general, Hannibal (considered one of the greatest military geniuses of all time), attacked from the north in a surprise move; was on the verge of destroying Rome when a Roman army landed in Carthage and he was forced to return home to defend his city
- Third Punic War (149 B.C.E.) - Rome invaded Carthage and burned the city to the ground

Expansion of the Republic

- In addition to Carthage, Rome also defeated the Macedonians in Greece, the Gauls to the north and the Spaniards to the west. Rome became preeminent power in eastern and western Mediterranean by the second century B.C.E.



Imperial Expansion and Domestic Problems

- Imperial expansion brought wealth and power but also class tensions (unequal distribution of wealth and strained governmental capacity)
 - Lands conquered by Rome often fell into the hands of wealthy families who established *latifundia*, enormous plantations which used the large land size and slave labor to produce products at a much cheaper cost than could the traditional, smaller Roman landowners.
 - Wealthy families used this economic edge to push smaller landowners out of business and gobble up their lands as well.
 - This displaced many small farmers, who moved to the cities, causing overcrowding among the plebeians and not enough jobs to support them.

Imperial Expansion and Domestic Problems

- The Roman currency was devalued causing a high rate of inflation. This meant that the plebeians did not have enough money to buy the things they could previously afford.
- Political leaders began fighting amongst themselves.

Imperial Expansion and Domestic Problems

- During the next two hundred years, the republican constitution was dismantled and a centralized imperial form of government was imposed
- The Gracchi brothers supported land redistribution to help solve the problems; both were assassinated
- For the next 100 years, dissatisfied Roman citizens sought leadership from politicians and generals who promised protection and justice.
- Policies often reflected the interests of the ruling elite and their class rather than concerns for the empire as a whole
- With tension rising, politicians and generals jockeyed for power and position
 - Years of terror and civil war resulted as poor Romans joined the personal armies of ambitious generals.

The Foundation of Empire



- Julius Caesar: very popular social reformer and conqueror (brought Gaul under Roman control)
 - Seized Rome in 49 B.C.E.
 - Claimed the title "dictator for life," 46 B.C.E.
 - Social reforms and centralized control
- Large-scale building projects and entertainment to employ the urban poor and keep them happy; Roman citizenship to imperial provinces
- Confiscated land from his opponents and redistributed it among his army's veterans
- Ruling elite was threatened by him so they organized his assassination in 44 B.C.E. (stabbed him to death)
 - His death only brought more chaos for 13 years

The Foundation of Empire

- Octavian brought civil conflict to an end (nephew and protégé of Julius Caesar)
 - Defeated his rival Mark Antony (and Cleopatra) and used the victory to consolidate his rule
 - Senate bestowed the title "Augustus Caesar", 27 B.C.E. (title suggested divine or semidivine status)
 - "Monarchy disguised as a republic" – preserved republican offices and included members of the elite in his government while still giving most power to himself (*the republic was essentially over and Rome was now an empire led by a single emperor*)
 - Created a new standing army under his control
 - Ruled for 45 years unopposed and allowed the institutions of empire to take root



Continuing Expansion and Integration

- Roman expansion into Mediterranean basin, western Europe, down Nile to Kush
- *Pax Romana* (Roman Peace), for two and a half centuries, which facilitated trade and communication throughout the empire
- Well-engineered Roman roads; postal system
- Roman law--tradition: Twelve Tablets (450 B.C.E.) – basic law code for citizens
 - Defendants were innocent until proven guilty
 - Defendants had a right to challenge their accusers before a judge (trials)



Economy and Society

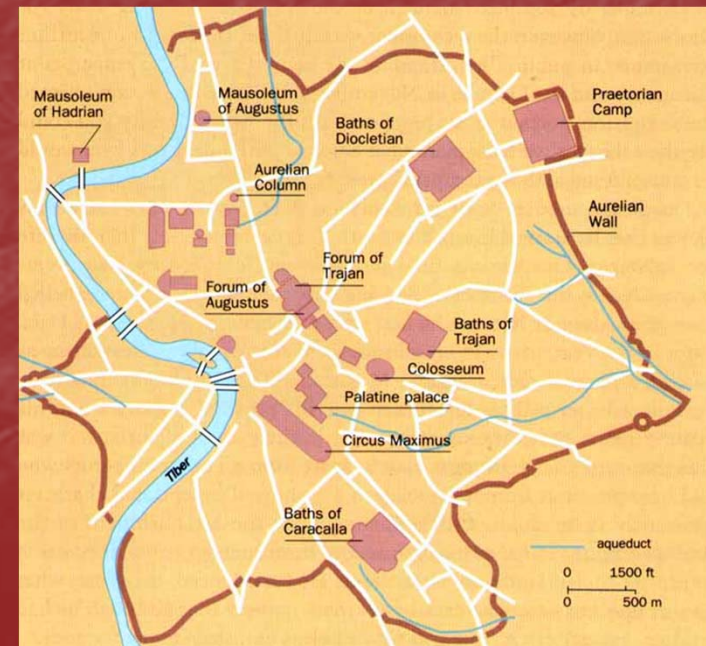
The expansion of Roman rule brought economic and social changes for people throughout the Mediterranean basin; this expansion was sustained through the use of slave labor and the confines of a patriarchal society

Trade and Urbanization

- Commercial agriculture played a pivotal role in the economic integration and expansion of the Roman empire
- Because of well-built roads, security of travel, and a consistent and enforced system of laws...
 - Merchants could be assured a steady supply of high-demand products and luxury goods.
 - Commercial farmers could be assured of markets and dependable prices for their crops.
 - Consumers, especially in Roman cities, could be assured of an array of goods and services not available in the Mediterranean before the rise of the Roman empire.

Trade and Urbanization

- Roman advances in engineering resulted in the construction of aqueducts, which brought huge amounts of fresh drinking water from the mountains into Roman cities.
- The invention of concrete made huge building projects possible and affordable.
- Sewage and plumbing systems, public baths, hippodromes, and arenas became part of every major Roman city.



Trade and Urbanization



- Owners of *latifundia* (plantations) focused on specialized production for export while Roman expansion meant the creation of a growing urban society in all parts of the empire

- Mediterranean trade
 - Sea lanes linked ports of the Mediterranean
 - Roman navy kept the seas largely free of pirates
 - The Mediterranean became a Roman lake

Trade and Urbanization

- The city of Rome
 - Wealth of the city fueled its urban development
 - Statues, pools, fountains, arches, temples, stadiums
 - Rome attracted numerous immigrants
 - Attractions: baths, pools, gymnasia, circuses (oval structures for chariot races – Circus Maximus), stadiums (battles to the death; gladiators and animals – Roman Coliseum), amphitheaters
 - *If you get a chance on your home computer – check out Google Earth Ancient Rome (3D images and recreations – awesome!)*





Family and Society

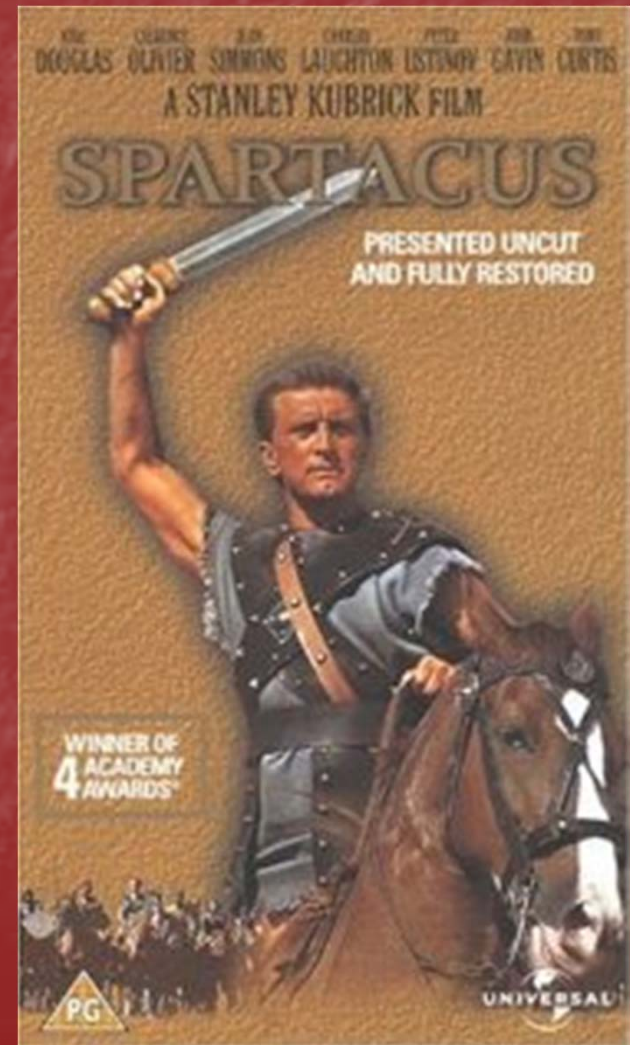
- The *pater familias*--eldest male of the family ruled
 - Made all decisions for family members, free servants, and slaves, including the questions of life and death
 - Could sell children into slavery or execute them - uncommon
 - Women wielded considerable influence within their families
 - Many women supervised family business and wealthy estates

Family and Society

- Wealth and social change
 - Newly rich classes built extravagant palaces and threw lavish banquets
 - Cultivators and urban masses lived at subsistence level
 - Poor classes became a serious problem in Rome and other cities where riots and rebellion were not uncommon, especially if food prices fluctuated
 - Urban poor and slave populations were sometimes appeased with "bread and circuses"

Family and Society

- Slavery--one-third of the population
 - Under the strict authority of their owner who had the right to sell them, punish them, and even kill them
 - Rural slaves = harsh conditions; often chained together
 - Spartacus's uprising in 73 B.C.E. – 70,000 rebellious slaves defeated by 40,000 well-trained troops
 - Urban slaves saw better conditions and possibility of manumission (freedom at age 30). They could potentially lead economically successful lives.



Cultural and Religious Traditions

Roads and communication networks encouraged the spread of religious ideas beyond their original foundations throughout the empire

The Cosmopolitan Mediterranean

- Greek philosophy and religions of salvation
 - Like most Neolithic peoples, the earliest Romans were polytheistic, worshipping gods associated with forces in nature and fertility.
 - Through their interaction with the Etruscans and later the Greeks, the Romans added other gods to their pantheon (all the gods of a religion) and other practices to their traditional rites.
 - Often adopted the religious and cultural traditions of conquered peoples

The Cosmopolitan Mediterranean

- Greek influence--Stoicism (sought to identify a set of universal moral standards based on nature and reason)
 - Appealed to Roman intellectuals
 - Cicero (106-43 B.C.E.) persuasive orator and writer on Stoicism (pursuit of justice was the individual's highest public duty)
 - Stoicism became the most prominent moral philosophy in Rome

The Cosmopolitan Mediterranean

- Religions of salvation gave sense of purpose and promised afterlife
 - Roman roads served as highways for religious spread
 - Mithraism was popular with Roman soldiers--men only (associated with strength, courage and discipline)
 - Cult of Isis (Egypt) very popular – temples throughout the empire; believed she would nurture her worshippers and help them cope with stress

Christianity and Judaism

- Initially, both Judaism and Christianity were tolerated by the Romans.
- The Romans allowed the conquered territories to practice their own faiths as long as doing so didn't interfere with the functioning of the empire.

Christianity and Judaism

■ Judaism

- Throughout the days of the Roman Republic and during the early days of the Roman Empire, paganism (polytheism) was the state religion.
- Roman citizens were required to make sacrifices to traditional Roman gods.
- Under various imperial regimes, the Jews struggled whenever an imperial power sought to promote some state cult.
 - As strict monotheists, the Jews refused to participate in state-sanctioned activities, no matter how minor or shallow the ceremony.
 - They considered such behavior to be blasphemy, and at times refused to pay taxes or obey any Roman laws that conflicted with their own.
 - Eventually, Jewish resistance to Roman control led to the suppression of Judaism, resulting in the exile of Jews from their homeland in 70 CE under the Roman Emperor Titus.

Christianity and Judaism

- The rise of Christianity
 - While some Jews openly fought the Romans, others sought salvation through isolation or through a God-delivered spiritual leader
 - Christianity emerged in this context as some Jews sought to form a community around Jesus of Nazareth, a charismatic leader who taught peace, devotion to God, and love for fellow human beings.
 - The Romans, concerned about another Jewish uprising and fearful about Jesus' proclamation that the "kingdom of God is at hand," arrested and executed him in the early 30s CE.

Christianity and Judaism

- Jesus' crucifixion did not quell the crowds nor end the movement. After his death, his closest followers proclaimed that he had risen from the grave, that he was the "Son of God," and that belief in him offered eternal rewards.
- These promises, plus the compilation of his teachings (the New Testament), began to spread Jesus' appeal far beyond the borders of Palestine.

Christianity and Judaism

- The principal figure in the expansion of Christianity beyond Judaism was Paul of Tarsus.
 - Taught a Christianity that attracted urban masses much like the religions of salvation
 - Called for individuals to observe high moral standards and to place their faith ahead of personal and family interests.
- However, for two centuries after the crucifixion of Jesus, there was no central authority for Christianity
 - Individual communities selected their own supervisors (bishops), who oversaw priests and governed their jurisdiction according to Christian doctrine
 - As a result, Christian views and practices varied considerably in the early days

Christianity and Judaism

- Like the Jews, the early Christians refused to honor the Roman state cults or revere the emperor as a god.
- As a result, Roman imperial authorities launched sporadic campaigns of persecution designed to eliminate Christianity as a threat to the empire (even killing them in open spectacles at the Coliseum).
- These acts of violence failed to stop the spread of Christianity.
 - The growth of Christianity reflects its appeal particularly to the lower classes, urban populations, and women.
 - It endowed them with a sense of spiritual freedom more meaningful than wealth, power, and social prominence.
 - It taught the spiritual equality of the sexes
 - By the third century CE, it had become the most dynamic and influential religious faith in the Mediterranean basin.