

The Roman Republic

Overview and a Brief History



How was Rome ruled?

The people of Rome were farmers and herders. For a time, they were under the control of their neighbors, the Etruscans. Rome became a rich city, ruled by kings. In 509 BC, the Romans drove out their last king, Tarquin the Proud. Rome then became a *republic*.


The republic was ruled by a *Senate*. Rich men, called *senators*, ran the government. Poor men (called plebeians) had much less power. The plebeians fought for fairer treatment. A plebeian, who was a free man (someone who was not a *slave*), could be a Roman *citizen*. People in lands conquered by the Romans could become citizens too. Women and slaves though, could not be citizens - so they could not vote in *elections*.

The Senate could not always control the Roman army. Army *generals* sometimes fought one another. Rome's best general

was Julius Caesar. He lived in the 1st century BC and invaded Britain twice. Caesar came close to being emperor of Rome, but he was murdered in 44 BC. By then, Rome was more than a city. It was the capital of an *empire*. The Romans ruled lands from France to North Africa. (See map above)

Fun Facts

In his portraits, Julius Caesar wore a wreath on his head to hide his baldness!



Who were the Roman emperors?

A Roman emperor was the man who ruled over the *empire*. The first Emperor ruled Rome after years of fighting between rival leaders. His name was Octavian. He took a new name, Augustus, when he became Emperor in 27 BC. Augustus brought peace after years of fighting. Not all the emperors were good and wise. Some were terrible. Some wanted to be gods.

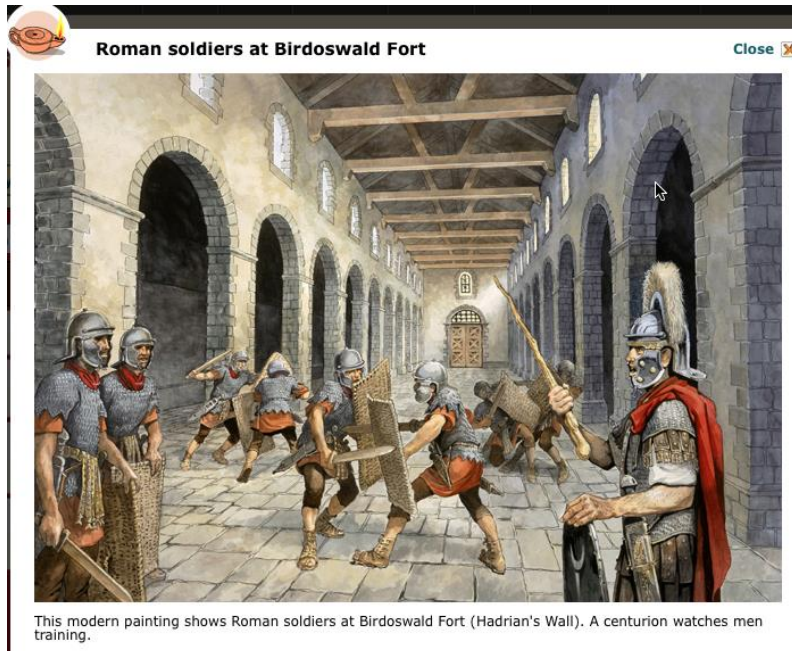
The emperor had a troop of special soldiers to protect him. They were called the Praetorian Guard. However, some of the bad emperors were so unpopular that their Praetorian Guards killed them!



Who was in the Roman army?

Only men could be in the Roman Army. No women. Every Roman soldier was a Roman citizen. He had to be at least 20 years old. He was not supposed to get married while he was a soldier. Most soldiers in the Roman *Empire* came from countries outside Italy. There were Roman soldiers from Africa, France, Germany, the Balkans, Spain and the Middle East.

Soldiers had to stay in the army for at least 25 years! Then they could retire, with a *pension* or a gift of land to farm. Old soldiers often settled down to old age together, in a military town or *colonia*.



What armour and weapons did the Romans have?

We know about Roman armour and weapons from Roman pictures and statues, and from finds by modern archaeologists.

A Roman soldier wore armour made from strips of iron and leather (*lorica segmentata* in Latin). On his head was a metal helmet (*galea*). He carried a rectangular shield (*scutum*), curved so it protected his body. The shield was made of wood and leather.

The soldier's main weapons were a short sword for stabbing (*gladius*) and a long spear, or javelin (*pilum*) for throwing. The

javelin had a sharp iron point, and a thin, bendy shaft. When it hit an enemy's shield, the point stuck in, but the shaft bent. This made it difficult to pull out. The long spear shaft got in the way, so the enemy soldier had to throw away his shield.

How well-trained were Roman soldiers?

Roman soldiers kept fit by running, marching and practice-fighting. They could march 20 miles (30 km) a day wearing armour. They could swim or cross rivers in boats, build bridges, and smash their way into *forts*. Each man carried his weapons and shield, some food and camping equipment (such as spare clothes, cooking pot and an axe or spade).

Roman soldiers almost always obeyed orders. They usually fought in lines, marching forward with their shields facing the enemy. If they were being fired at from above (with arrows or rocks), the men would lift their shields over their heads for protection. They looked like a tortoise, so they called this formation the *testudo* (Latin for tortoise).



Roman swords were short. This sword belonged to a Roman army officer.

How did Romans heat their homes?

Rich Romans liked to be warm and cosy. They had central heating at home, in *villas* and in public baths. The heating system was kept going by slaves, who kept a fire blazing in a furnace to heat warm air. The warm air moved around the building through spaces under the floors and between the walls. The underfloor space was made by raising the floor on top of piles of tile or stone. The Roman heating system was called a *hypocaust*.

What are aqueducts?

Although they did not invent the arch, the Romans were the first people to build arches into big buildings and *aqueducts*. An aqueduct was built to carry water. It was like a bridge, built on arches. On top was a stone channel to carry water. The Romans used aqueducts to supply towns with water from springs, rivers or lakes. The aqueduct sloped downhill towards the town, because water will only flow downhill.

The Romans also used arches in buildings. They made very big buildings with arched roofs. These roofs did not need rows of pillars, or columns, to hold them up - like in a Greek temple. A famous Roman building, the Pantheon in Rome, was the first big building with a dome.



The Pont du Gard is a Roman aqueduct (for carrying water). It is in the south of France.

Why didn't the Romans need many machines?

The Romans were good at building roads and bridges, but not so keen on machines. They had slaves to do nasty jobs and heavy

work. The Roman crane, for example, didn't have an engine. It was powered by slaves or animals. The Romans invented war machines, like *catapults*, worked by twisted ropes and springs, and a reaping machine, for cutting corn. But the Romans never needed machines to take the place of slaves.

Did Romans Have Smelly Drains?

The Romans were keen on keeping clean. Towns and forts had underground drains to take away dirty water and sewage. The drain pipes were flushed through with water from the baths, so they didn't get too smelly. From remains and writings found at Pompeii, in Italy, we know that most towns had plumbers, and also laundries where workers washed and ironed people's clothes. Fresh clean water and *sewers* are important. Without them, people risk catching diseases from drinking dirty water or from sewage left around streets and houses.

What kind of gods did Romans worship?

At first, Romans believed in many different gods and goddesses. These gods were like people, but with magical powers. The Roman gods were part of a family. People told stories or *myths* about them. Each god or goddess looked after different people or things.

These are a few of the old Roman gods:

Saturn: once king of the gods, his place was taken by his son (Jupiter). Saturn was the god of seed-sowing. A merry Roman holiday or festival, the Saturnalia, was named after him.

Jupiter: god of the sky, he was the most important god.

Juno: Jupiter's wife, she looked after women.

Neptune: Jupiter's brother, he was the god of the sea.

Minerva: goddess of wisdom and women's work, such as weaving cloth.

Mars: god of war, though originally god of farming.

Venus: goddess of love, she was the lover of Mars.

The Birth of Christianity

During the first century CE, a new religion took hold in Rome. It was called Christianity. The followers of Christianity were called

Christians. Christians believed in one god. They refused to worship the Roman gods in ancient Rome, that was against the law. Christians were hunted as criminals.

In spite of persecution, Christians grew in numbers rapidly. Christians actively looked for converts. They told others about the benefits of being Christian. Christians came from every walk of life in ancient Rome, but Christianity had great appeal to Rome's poor.

Life After Death: Christianity promised life after death in heaven. In the Roman religion, only gods went to heaven. Emperors were considered gods. Everyone else went to the underworld.

Equality: Christianity promised equal opportunity. You had to be born into the nobility. You could join Christianity and be equally Christian.

After nearly 300 years of persecution, in 313 CE, Emperor Constantine ruled that Christianity was legal and that Christians would no longer be persecuted for their beliefs.

This does not mean that Rome had religious freedom. It meant only that it was now legal to worship Roman gods or to be Christian. Every other religion was still illegal.

The Fall of Rome

Rome had quite a run. First a monarchy, then a republic, then an empire – all roads led to Rome for over 1200 years. In the Mediterranean, Rome was in charge. During the Imperial period, Rome had some wonderful emperors. Rome also suffered from a series of bad, corrupt and just plain crazy emperors. There were lots of reasons why Rome fell.

Problems towards the end of the Empire included

- The empire was too large to govern effectively.
- The army was not what it used to be. There was corruption in the military - dishonest generals and non-Roman soldiers.
- Civil wars broke out between different political groups.

- Emperors were often selected by violence, or by birth, so the head of government was not always a capable leader.
- The increased use of slaves put many Romans out of work
- The rich became lazy and showed little interest in trying to solve Rome problems.
- The poor were overtaxed and overworked. They were very unhappy.
- Prices increased, trade decreased.
- The population was shrinking due to starvation and disease. That made it difficult to manage farms and government effectively.
- The Empire starting shrinking. The Huns, Visigoths, Franks, Vandals, Saxons and other barbarian tribes overran the empire.

The ancient Romans tried to solve some of their problems by splitting the Roman Empire in half, hoping that would make the empire easier to manage. Each side had an emperor, but the emperor in charge was the emperor of the western half, the half that included the city of Rome.

The Western Roman Empire did not do well. Instead of getting stronger, they became weaker. By 400 AD, it was pretty much over. The Huns, Franks, Vandals, Saxons, Visigoths – any of these barbarian tribes might have been the group that finally brought Rome down. They were all attacking various pieces of the Western Roman Empire. In 476 AD, the Visigoths sacked Rome. Europe entered the Dark Ages.

The Eastern Roman Empire received a new name – the Byzantine Empire. The Byzantine Empire did fine. It lasted for another 1000 years!

Date	Event
753 BC	<p>Rome is founded</p> <p>Rome was founded by Romulus. Romulus was the first of the seven Roman kings. The original name of Rome was Roma.</p>
509 BC	<p>Rome becomes a Republic</p> <p>The last king is expelled and Rome is now ruled by senators. There is a constitution with laws and Rome becomes a complex republican government.</p>
218 BC	<p>Hannibal invades Italy</p> <p>Hannibal leads the Carthage army to attack Italy. This becomes part of the Second Punic War.</p>
45 BC	<p>Julius Caesar becomes the first dictator of Rome</p> <p>Julius Caesar defeats Pompey in a civil war. He becomes the supreme ruler of Rome. This is the end of the Roman Republic. He hires Sosigenes, an Egyptian astronomer, to work out a new 12 month calendar.</p>
44 BC	<p>Julius Caesar is assassinated</p> <p>Julius Caesar is assassinated on the Ides of March by Marcus Brutus. They hope to bring back the republic, but civil war breaks out instead.</p>
27 BC	<p>Roman Empire begins</p> <p>Octavius appoints himself "Augustus", which means the first emperor.</p>
64	<p>Much of Rome burns</p> <p>Nero set fire to Rome and blames the Christians for it.</p>
80	

	<p>Colosseum is built</p> <p>The Colosseum was built in 80 AD. The completion of the Colosseum was celebrated with 100 days of games. The Romans invade Scotland.</p>
122	<p>Hadrian Wall is built</p> <p>The Hadrian Wall was built in 122 AD. It was a long wall built across northern England in an effort to keep the barbarians out.</p>
306	<p>Constantine becomes Emperor in 306 AD</p> <p>Rome becomes a Christian empire. Before this, Rome persecuted the Christians. Constantius dies. His son Constantine is the new vice-emperor of Galerius.</p>
380	<p>Christianity</p> <p>Theodosius I proclaims Christianity as the sole religion of the Roman Empire in 380 AD.</p>
395	<p>Rome splits</p> <p>In 395 AD, Rome split into two empires - the Western Roman Empire and the Eastern Roman Empire. Each side had a ruler in charge of it. The Roman Empire was split by Theodosius.</p>
410	<p>The Visigoths sack Rome</p> <p>This was the first time in 800 years that the city of Rome has fallen to an enemy. It was a huge uproar.</p>
476	<p>End of the Western Roman Empire and the fall of Ancient Rome</p> <p>The last Roman Emperor Romulus Augustus is defeated by the German Goth Odoacer. This is the start of the Dark Ages in Europe.</p>
1453	<p>The Byzantine Empire ends</p> <p>The Byzantine Empire comes to an end as it falls</p>

	to the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Turks capture Constantinople in 1453 A.D. It is renamed Istanbul in 1930.
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"The Fall of Rome - Ancient Rome for Kids." *The Fall of Rome - Ancient Rome for Kids*. N.p., n.d. Web. 17 Feb. 2014. <<http://rome.mrdonn.org/fall.html>>.

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