

Lesson 9 Reading

Ancient Rome

The civilization of Rome developed on the Italian **peninsula**, a long, boot-shaped piece of land in Europe, surrounded on three sides by water. To the north of Italy lies the rest of northern Europe, while to the south, east, and west lay the seas.

On this peninsula are two major mountain ranges: the lofty Alps, which extend along Italy's northern border; and the Apennines, which stretch like a backbone down the length of Italy. Their peaks and hillsides cover most of the peninsula.

The small amount of Italy that is not mountainous is made up of high, rocky coastland or level plains. Several rivers, including the Po and the Tiber, flow through these areas to the sea. Romans settled near rivers, just as other early civilizations did.

Find the city of **Rome** on the map *The Italian Peninsula*. Notice that it is located about midway down

the peninsula, on the Tiber River and close to the sea. This was a good place to found a city, since its hillside location made it easy to defend and it sat at the point where crossing the Tiber was easiest. Rome also lay on the route from the Apennine Mountains to the sea.

As you will learn in this unit, several different cultures **converged** in Rome. The Greeks, for example, settled nearby, on other parts of the peninsula. Rome's access to the Silk Road allowed Indian and Chinese cultures to influence the Romans as well.

As the map of the Roman Empire shows, Rome gradually grew from a city into an empire that extended into Europe and parts of Africa and Asia. Today, the legacy of ancient Rome lives on in the things it has left to the western civilization. In this unit, you will learn how Rome grew into an empire. You will also learn about Rome's lasting influence on the world today.

The Rise of the Roman Republic

What were the characteristics of the Roman Republic, and how did they change over time?

Etruscan kings from northern Italy ruled early Rome. Around 509 B.C.E., the Romans overthrew the Etruscans and created a **republic**, a form of government in which leaders are elected to represent the people.

Ancient Romans told an interesting story about the overthrow of their Etruscan rulers. One day, two Etruscan princes visited the famous **oracle** at Delphi (DEL-fie), in Greece. A Roman named Lucius Junius Brutus traveled with them.

At Delphi, the princes asked the oracle which one of them would be the next king of Rome. The oracle answered, “The next man to have authority in Rome will be the man who first kisses his mother.” Hearing this prediction, Brutus pretended to trip. He fell on his face, and his lips touched Earth, which is often considered the mother of all living things.

Back in Rome, Brutus led the revolt that eliminated the Etruscan kings. The oracle's mysterious words came true, to some degree, because Brutus became one of the first leaders of the new republic. The Roman people were now free to govern themselves.

Unfortunately, not all Romans were equal under this new system. Power in the early republic belonged to rich men called **patricians** (pah-TRIH-shens). The majority of Romans, the **plebeians** (pleh-BEE-anz), had no voice in the government. In this lesson, you will see how a long struggle between patricians and plebeians shaped the government of Rome.

Patricians and Plebeians Under Etruscan Rule

Between 616 and 509 B.C.E., the Etruscans ruled Rome. During this time, Roman society was divided into two classes, patricians and plebeians.

Upper-class citizens, called **patricians**, came from a small group of wealthy landowners. *Patrician* comes from the Latin word *pater*, which translates to “father.” The

patricians chose from among themselves the “fathers of the state,” the men who advised the Etruscan king. Patricians controlled the most valuable land and also held the important military and religious offices.

Free non-patricians called **plebeians**, who comprised about 95 percent of Rome's population, were mostly peasants, laborers, craftspeople, and shopkeepers. The word *plebeian* comes from *plebs*, which translates to “the common people.” Plebeians could not be priests or government officials and had little voice in the government, but they were still forced to serve in the army.

The Patricians Create a Republic

Eventually, the patricians resented the Etruscan rule. In 509 B.C.E., a group of patricians, led by Lucius Junius Brutus, rebelled and drove out the last Etruscan king. Instead of a monarchy, they developed a **republic**, in which elected officials govern for the people.

To the patricians, “the people” meant themselves, not the plebeians. The patricians placed most of the power in the hands of the **Senate**, which was a group of 300 patricians

elected by patricians. The senators served for life. They also appointed other government officials.

Two elected leaders, called **consuls**, shared command of the army. The Senate was supposed to advise the consuls and their decisions were considered law.

The creation of the republic gave Rome a more democratic form of government. However, only the patricians could participate in that government.

The Plebeians Rebel

Even though Rome was now a republic, the patricians retained all the power. They ensured that only they could participate in the government. Only they could become senators or consuls. Plebeians had to obey their decisions. Because laws were not written down, patricians often changed or interpreted the laws to benefit themselves. As a result, a small group of families maintained all the power in Rome.

The plebeians had to unite and fight for what they wanted. They began to demand more political rights. The struggle between plebeians and patricians is referred to as the

Conflict of the Orders, a conflict between the two social classes.

The rivalry grew especially heated during times of war. The new republic frequently fought wars against neighboring tribes. Plebeians resented the fact that they were required to fight in the army even though the patricians decided whether to go to war.

The struggle took a dramatic turn in the year 494 B.C.E., at which point Rome was a city of twenty to forty thousand people, and the majority of the population was plebeian. Angry over their lack of power, the plebeians marched out of the city and camped on a nearby hill, refusing to return until the patricians met their demands.

Work in the city and on the farms came to a halt, putting Rome in a crisis. Without the plebeians, patricians feared that the army would be helpless if an enemy struck at Rome. “A great panic seized the city,” wrote Livy, a noted Roman historian. With Rome quickly deteriorating, the patricians had little choice but to compromise.

The Plebeians Gain Political Equality

The plebeians' revolt led to a major change in Roman government. The patricians agreed to allow the plebeians to elect officials called Tribunes of the Plebs. The **tribunes** represented the plebeians in the Senate and with the consuls. Later, tribunes gained the power to **veto**, or overrule, actions by the Senate and other government officials. Eventually, the number of tribunes increased from two to ten.

Plebeians could also elect a lawmaking body, the Council of Plebs. However, the council created laws only for plebeians, not for patricians.

Although the plebeians had gained some important rights, they still held less power than the patricians. Over the next 200 years, the plebeians conducted a series of protests to gradually win political equality.

First, they demanded that the laws be transcribed, or written down so that the patricians couldn't change them at will. Around the year 451 B.C.E., the patricians

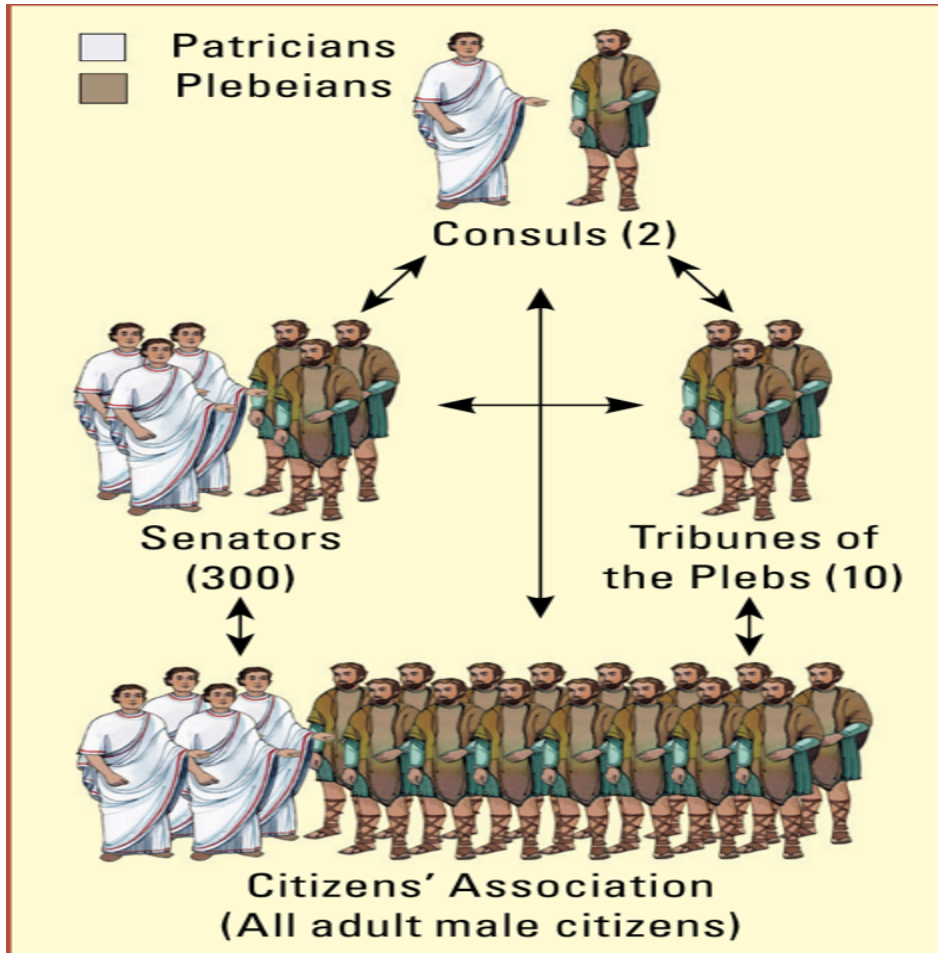
agreed, and the laws were **published** on tablets called the **Twelve Tables**.

Next, in **367 B.C.E.**, a new law stated that one of the **two consuls** must be a **plebeian**. Former consuls held seats in the **Senate**, so this change also allowed plebeians to become senators.

Finally, in **287 B.C.E.**, the plebeians earned the right to pass laws for all Roman citizens. Now, assemblies of all Roman citizens, such as the **Citizens' Association**, could approve or reject laws. These plebeian assemblies also chose the consuls, the tribunes, and the members of the **Senate**. The number of plebeians who served alongside patricians in the Senate continued to increase. After **200** years of struggle, the plebeians had won their fight for equality. The diagram shown here illustrates the organization of the Roman Republic following this victory.

Rome's republican form of government inspired future European and American leaders. Rome became an example of a type of government ruled by a set of basic

laws, or a **constitution**. Future political thinkers also drew from Roman ideals of elected assemblies, citizenship, and civic duty. They adopted the model of governmental bodies that could check each other's power. Most importantly, they were inspired by the spirit of republicanism, which means that government should rule for the good of the people. Cicero (SIS-eh-roh), a famous Roman statesman, captured this spirit when he wrote, "The people's good is the highest law."



From Republic to Empire

Did the benefits of Roman expansion outweigh the costs?

As the ancient republic of Rome grew, its power expanded. By the early 1st century C.E., it had become a mighty empire that ruled the entire Mediterranean world.

The expansion of Roman power occurred over about five hundred years, from 509 B.C.E. to 14 C.E. At the beginning

of this period, Rome was a tiny republic in central Italy. However, five hundred years later, it was the thriving center of a vast empire. At its height, the Roman Empire included most of Europe, together with North Africa, Egypt, much of the present-day Middle East, and Asia Minor.

The increase of Rome's power happened gradually and came at a price. Romans had to fight countless wars to defend their developing territory and to conquer new lands. Along the way, Rome itself transformed. The Romans had once been proud to be governed under a republic of elected leaders. Their heroes were men who had helped to preserve the republic. Leaders in different parts of the world would later be inspired by this structure of government.

However, by 14 C.E., the republic was just a memory. Power was in the hands of a single supreme ruler, the emperor. Some Romans even worshipped old emperors as gods, an act that shows how powerful these rulers could be.

In this lesson, you'll see how this dramatic change occurred. You'll trace the gradual expansion of Roman

power. You will also explore the costs of this expansion, both for Romans and for the people they conquered.

From Republic to Empire: An Overview

The growth of Rome from a republic to an empire happened over 500 years. The story has four major periods.

The First Period of Expansion

The first period of expansion, or becoming larger, began in 509 B.C.E. At this time, the Romans drove the last Etruscan king out of power, and Rome became a republic.

The Romans wanted to protect their borders and to gain more land, which led to a series of wars. During the next 245 years, the Romans combatted one enemy after another. They conquered their Latin neighbors in central Italy and also defeated their old rulers, the Etruscans.

Wisely, the Romans eventually made allies, or friends, of their former enemies. By 264 B.C.E., Rome and its allies controlled the entire Italian peninsula.

The Second Period of Expansion

Rome's growth threatened two great powers—the Persian Empire and the city of Carthage (KAR-thidge) in North Africa. During the second period of expansion, from 264 to 146 B.C.E., Rome and Carthage fought three major wars. Through these wars, Rome gained control of North Africa, much of Spain, and the island of Sicily. Roman armies also conquered Macedonia and Greece.

The Third Period of Expansion

During the third period of expansion, from 145 to 44 B.C.E., Rome came to rule the entire Mediterranean world. In the east, Rome took control of Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt. In the west, the Roman general Julius Caesar conquered much of Gaul (modern-day France).

Proud Romans now called the Mediterranean “our sea.” However, the republic was in trouble because civil wars divided the city. Roman generals were becoming dictators and setting their armies against the power of the Senate. Caesar himself ruled as a dictator for life until he was assassinated in 44 B.C.E.

The men who murdered Caesar thought they were saving the power of the Senate. However, several more years of civil war followed. Then Caesar's grandnephew, Octavian, seized total power. The Senate named him Augustus, or “honored one.” Rome was now an empire governed by one supreme ruler.

The Fourth Period of Expansion

The fourth period of expansion began with the start of the empire and lasted until 14 C.E. The first emperor, Augustus, added an enormous amount of new territory by pushing the borders of the empire all the way to natural boundaries, like rivers, to more easily defend it. Later emperors continued to add more territory so that, at its height, the Roman Empire stretched from the island of Britain in the northwest to the Black Sea in the east.

Each period of expansion involved cost and sacrifice. The next four sections provide more details about each expansion. As you read, ask yourself how Romans of the time might have perceived these events.

Daily Life in the Roman Empire

How did wealth affect daily life in the Roman Empire?

Around 100 C.E., the Roman Empire was at the height of its power. “All roads lead to Rome,” boasted the Romans. For thousands of miles, road markers showed the distance from a location to Rome.

But more than roads connected the empire's 50 million people. They were also connected by Roman law, Roman customs, and Roman military might.

If Rome was the center of the empire, the Forum was the center of Rome. The word **forum** means “gathering place.” The original Forum was an open area used for merchants' stalls, and for viewing races, games, and plays. Eventually, the Forum became a sprawling complex of government buildings, meeting halls, temples, theaters, and monuments. This place was the heart of life in Rome.

In this lesson, you will visit this bustling center of Rome's vast empire. You'll learn about different areas of daily life in ancient Rome including how the Romans ran their government and spent their spare time. You will also find out where the Romans lived and how they practiced religion.

By examining these aspects of ancient Roman culture, you will discover how life drastically differed for the rich and the poor. Daily life in Rome also varied greatly for men and women. As you explore the daily lives of the Romans, note how similar or different they are to your daily life.

Daily Life in Ancient Rome

If you had visited Rome in the 1st century C.E., you would have encountered a city of great contrasts. Nearly one million people resided in the empire's capital city. Although Rome was full of beautiful temples, stately palaces, and flowering gardens, most of its people lived in tiny apartments crammed into narrow, dirty streets.

In the city's **forum**, or public gathering place, wealthy Roman women shopped for goods, followed around by their slaves. Proud senators strolled about, protected by their bodyguards, while soldiers marched through the streets. Merchants and craftspeople labored at their trades, while foreigners roamed the streets from such faraway places as Britain, Spain, and Egypt. In the midst of it all were Rome's slaves—hundreds of thousands of them, many of them captured in war.

People and goods flowed into Rome from the four corners of the empire as well as from China and India. Wealthy Romans spent enormous sums of money on silks, jeweled weapons, perfumes, and musical instruments. They decorated their homes with statues, fountains, and fine pottery.

However, the rich were only a small portion of Rome's population since the majority of the city's people lived in filthy neighborhoods filled with crime and disease. Their children were lucky to survive past age ten. To keep the poor from turning into an angry, dangerous mob, Roman

emperors donated food and provided entertainment, such as gladiator contests and chariot races.

The empire had many large cities, but most people lived in the countryside where most of the people were also poor. Some worked their own small farms, but others labored on huge estates owned by the rich.

Law and Order

The Romans always believed in the rule of law. In the days of the republic, the Senate and the assemblies were important sources of law. But in the empire, the ultimate source of law was the emperor. As one Roman judge stated, “Whatever pleases the emperor is the law.”

Even in the empire, however, Romans honored some of their old traditions. The Senate continued to meet, and senators had high status in society. They developed their own styles of clothing, which may have included special rings, pins, or togas (robes) trimmed with a wide purple stripe. Important senators hired personal bodyguards who carried fasces, bundles of sticks with an ax in the center. The fasces were symbols of the government's right

to punish lawbreakers. When carried inside the city, the ax was removed, to symbolize the right of Roman citizens to appeal a ruling against them.

Roman laws were strict but necessary since crime was common in Rome. The most frequent crimes were stealing, assault, and murder. Roman police protectively watched wealthy neighborhoods, but rarely patrolled the poor sections of the city. In fact, some streets were so dangerous that they were closed at night. To pay these officers, the Roman government taxed its citizens.

Romans tried to protect themselves against crime. Rich men attempted to hide their wealth by wearing old, dirty togas when they traveled at night. Women and children in rich families were told never to go outdoors alone, even during the day.

Any Roman, including the poor, could accuse someone else of a crime. A jury of citizens decided the case. Accused persons sometimes tried to win the jury's sympathy by wearing rags or dirty clothes to court or by having their wives and children sob in front of the jury.

Romans believed that one law should apply to all citizens. Still, under the empire, Roman law was not applied equally. The poor, who were often not citizens, faced harsher punishments than the rich, sometimes even torture.

Religion

Religion was important to the Romans. As you may know, the Romans adopted many Greek gods. They also adopted gods from other cultures to create their own group of gods.

Romans wanted to please their gods because they believed that these deities controlled their daily lives. At Rome's many temples and shrines, people made offerings and promises to the gods. They often left gifts of food, such as honey cakes and fruit. They also sacrificed animals, including bulls, sheep, and oxen.

When someone was sick or injured, Romans would leave a small offering at a temple in the shape of the hurt part of the body. For instance, they might leave a clay foot to remind the god which part of the body to cure.

While festivals and holidays, or “holy days,” were held throughout the year to honor the gods, religion was also a part of daily life. Each home had an altar where the family worshipped its own household gods and spirits. The family hearth, or fireplace, was sacred to the goddess Vesta. Once a year, during the main meal, the family threw a small cake into the fire as an offering to Vesta.

Eventually, the Romans came to honor their emperors as gods. One emperor, Caligula (kah-LIG-yoo-lah), had a temple constructed to house a statue of himself made of gold. Every day, the statue was dressed in the type of clothes that Caligula was wearing that day.

As the empire grew, foreigners brought new forms of worship to Rome. The Romans welcomed most of these new religions, as long as they didn't encourage disloyalty to the emperor.

Housing

Similar to food, housing in Rome differed greatly for the rich and for the poor. The spacious, airy homes of the rich

stood side by side with the small, dark apartments that housed the poor.

Wealthy Romans lived in grand houses, built of stone and marble. Thick walls shut out the noise and dirt of the urban city.

Inside the front door was a hall called an *atrium* where the family received guests. An indoor pool helped to keep the atrium cool, and an opening in the roof allowed for plenty of light.

Beyond the atrium, there were many rooms for the family and guests. The fanciest room was the dining room because its walls were covered in pictures, both painted murals and mosaics made of tiles. Mosaics also decorated the floors, while graceful statues stood in the corners. Some dining rooms had beautiful fountains in the center to provide guests with cool water.

During dinner parties, guests lay on couches and ate delicious meals prepared by slaves. While they feasted, they listened to slaves play music on flutes and stringed instruments, such as the lyre and the lute.

Nearby, many of the poor crowded into tall apartment buildings. Others lived in small apartments above the shops where they worked. Without proper kitchens, the poor cooked their meals on small portable grills, which filled the rooms with smoke.

The apartments were cramped, noisy, and dirty. Filth and disease-carrying rats caused sickness to spread rapidly. Fire was another danger since many of the buildings were made of wood, and the cooking grills caught fire easily. In 64 C.E., a disastrous fire broke out that burned down much of the city.

Education

If you had grown up in ancient Rome, your education would have depended on the type of family you were born into. Many poor children in Rome were sent to work instead of to school in order to learn trades, such as leatherworking and metalworking, to earn money for their families.

In wealthier families, boys and girls were tutored by their fathers, or often by slaves, until they were about six years old. Then boys went off to school. Classes were held in public

buildings and private homes. Many of the tutors were educated Greek slaves.

A typical school day in Rome began very early in the morning. Students walked through crowded streets, carrying their supplies in a leather shoulder bag. On the way, they stopped at local breakfast bars where they purchased beans, nuts, and freshly baked bread to munch on while they walked to class.

Once at school, students sat on small stools around the tutor and used a pointed pen, called a stylus, to copy down lessons on small, wax-covered wooden boards. When the lesson was over, they rubbed out the writing with the flat end of the stylus so they could use the board again. The school day lasted until two or three o'clock in the afternoon.

Roman boys learned Latin, Greek, math, science, literature, music, and public speaking. They typically became soldiers, doctors, politicians, or lawyers. Girls might become dentists, real estate agents, or tutors, while some female slaves or freedwomen could become midwives (nurses who helped with childbirth).

Upper-class boys remained in school until age 12 or 13. Boys from very wealthy families often continued their studies until they were 16, when they began to manage their own properties.

Christianity Spreads

By the 60s C.E., Christians were beginning to attract the notice of the Romans. Christian preachers traveled along the roads of the empire, winning converts to their new religion. Both Paul and Peter, a close friend of Jesus, preached in Rome. Initially, Rome was not unfriendly to Christians. What was another god, among so many?

However, Christians refused to worship the other Roman gods. Worse, they would not accept that the emperor was a god. Their way of life seemed to be an insult to Roman customs. Instead of wealth and luxury, they preached about simplicity. Recalling Jesus's message of peace and love, many refused to serve in the army.

As the number of Christians increased, many Romans viewed them as a threat to Roman order and patriotism. Eventually, the Christian religion was declared illegal.

Some emperors were determined to make an example of these disloyal citizens. For refusing to honor the Roman gods, Christians were sentenced to die in cruel and painful ways. Some were crucified, and some were burned to death. Others were brought into arenas, where they were devoured by wild animals in front of cheering crowds.

Instead of destroying the new religion, the Christians won new followers by facing death bravely. Christianity offered many people in the empire a sense of purpose and hope. It taught that even the poor and enslaved could look forward to a better life after death if they followed the teachings of Jesus.

Gradually, people of all classes began to adopt the new faith. By 300 C.E., millions of Christians resided in the Roman lands of Europe, North Africa, and western Asia.

At the beginning of the lesson, you read about the emperor Constantine and how a victory in battle made him favor the Christian religion. In 313 C.E., Constantine announced the Edict of Milan in which he gave Christians the freedom to practice their religion openly. Future emperors also accepted

the new faith. Emperor Theodosius I banned all pagan sacrifices. By 380, Christianity was the official religion of the Roman Empire.