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Rome's location on the Italian peninsula, centrally located in the Mediterranean Sea, benefited the Romans as they expanded. Italy also had wide, fertile plains, which supported a growing population.



>> Praetorian Guards were skilled and loyal bodyguards who protected generals during the time of the late republic. Later, they became an elite guard for Roman emperors.

# Ancient Rome and the Origins of Christianity

## The Roman Republic

**The Founding of Rome** By about 800 B.C., the ancestors of the Romans, called the Latins, had migrated into Italy. The Latins settled along the Tiber River in small villages scattered over seven low-lying hills. There, they herded and farmed. Their villages would in time grow together into the city of Rome.

Romans shared the Italian peninsula with Greek colonists and the Etruscans—a people who at one time ruled most of central Italy. The Romans learned from the Etruscans, studying their engineering techniques and adapting their alphabet. The Romans ousted their Etruscan ruler and founded Rome in 509 B.C.

**Birth of the Roman Republic** The Romans established a new form of government called a **republic**, in which people chose their own officials. This form of government would prevent any individual from obtaining too much power.

### >> Objectives

**Analyze** the history and nature of the Roman republic.

**Trace** the rise and decline of the Roman empire.

**Describe** the major achievements of Roman civilization.

**Understand** the origins and teachings of early Christianity.

### >> Key Terms

|               |           |
|---------------|-----------|
| republic      | heresy    |
| patrician     | Augustine |
| plebeian      |           |
| consul        |           |
| dictator      |           |
| tribune       |           |
| veto          |           |
| imperialism   |           |
| Julius Caesar |           |
| Augustus      |           |
| Hadrian       |           |
| Diocletian    |           |
| Constantine   |           |
| Virgil        |           |
| aqueduct      |           |
| messiah       |           |
| Jesus         |           |
| apostle       |           |
| Paul          |           |
| pope          |           |
| martyr        |           |



The main governing body was the senate. Originally, all 300 members were **patricians**, or members of the landholding upper class. Each year, the senators nominated two **consuls** from the patrician class to supervise the government and command the armies. Also, in the event of war, the senate might choose a temporary **dictator**, or ruler with complete control over the government.


**Plebeians**, or common people, at first had little influence in the republic. However, the plebeians fought for the right to elect their own officials, called **tribunes**. The tribunes could **veto**, or block, laws that they felt harmed the plebeians. Although the senate still dominated the government, the plebeians had gained access to power and their rights were protected.

**Roman Society** The family was the basic unit of Roman society. The male head of the household had absolute power in the family. During the early Roman Republic, women had few rights. Later, they were able to own property and run businesses. Girls and boys from the upper and lower classes learned to read and write.

The Romans believed in many gods and goddesses, who resembled those of the Etruscans and Greeks. Numerous festivals were held to honor the gods and goddesses and to ensure divine favor for the city.



>> Julius Caesar dictated his commentaries on war to scribes who recorded his words.

 **Interactive Map**

**Expansion of Rome** By 270 B.C., Rome controlled most of the Italian peninsula. This was due mainly to a well-trained army. The basic military unit was the legion. Each legion included about 5,000 citizen-soldiers. As Rome conquered new territories, they treated their defeated enemies well. As long as conquered peoples accepted Roman rule and obeyed certain laws, the Romans allowed them to maintain their own customs and governments.

**? SUMMARIZE** How did the common people gain influence in the Roman republic?

## The Roman Empire Rises and Declines

As Rome extended its territory, it encountered Carthage, an empire that stretched across North Africa and the western Mediterranean. These two powers battled in the three Punic Wars, which lasted from 264 B.C. to 146 B.C., when Rome finally destroyed Carthage.

Rome was committed to a policy of **imperialism**, establishing control over foreign lands. Roman power soon spread from Spain to Egypt. Rome soon controlled busy trade routes that brought tremendous riches.

**Troubles in the Republic** Conquest brought problems to Rome. Wealthy families purchased large estates and forced war captives to work as their slaves. Widespread use of slave labor and declining grain prices hurt small farmers. The gap between rich and poor grew, leading to corruption and riots.

The senate felt threatened when the patrician tribunes Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus attempted reforms. They were killed in street riots staged by the senate, leading to a period of civil wars.

**Caesar Takes Power** Out of the chaos emerged **Julius Caesar**, a brilliant military commander. By B.C., after nine years of fighting, he completed the conquest of Gaul—the area that is now France and Belgium. Rivalry erupted between him and another general, Pompey. After defeating Pompey, Caesar swept around the Mediterranean, suppressing rebellions.

Victorious, Caesar returned to Rome and forced the senate to make him dictator for life. He pushed through a number of reforms to help solve Rome's many problems.

Fearing Caesar's growing power, his enemies killed him in 44 B.C. Caesar's friend, Marc Antony, and his nephew, Octavian, joined forces to avenge Caesar.



## Comparing Structures of Government

| ROMAN REPUBLIC   |  | ROMAN EMPIRE   |
|--|--|--|
| <b>HIGHEST OFFICIALS</b>   |  | <b>HIGHEST OFFICIALS</b>   |
| <b>Two Consuls</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>annually elected</li> <li>held equal power</li> </ul>  | <b>Dictator</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>appointed in times of emergency</li> <li>held office for 6 months only</li> </ul>   | <b>Emperor</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>inherited power</li> <li>served for life</li> <li>if served well, was worshipped as a god after death</li> </ul>   |
| <b>GOVERNING BODIES</b>  |  | <b>GOVERNING BODIES</b>  |
| <b>Senate</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>issued advisory decrees to magistrates and people</li> <li>in practice, held enormous power</li> <li>had about 300 members</li> </ul> | <b>Popular Assemblies</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>two assemblies: centuriate (military), tribal (nonmilitary)</li> <li>elected magistrates, held legislative power, made key decisions</li> </ul> | <b>Senate</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>issued binding decrees, acted as a high court, elected magistrates</li> <li>in practice, held little power as compared to the emperor</li> <li>had about 600 members</li> </ul> |

>> **Analyze Charts** There were significant differences between the governments of the Roman republic and the Roman empire. For a plebeian, which of the two structures of government would be preferable?

However, they soon battled one another for power. In 31 B.C., Octavian defeated Antony.

**The Roman Empire** With this triumph, the senate gave Octavian the title of **Augustus**, or “Exalted One.” Under Augustus, who ruled from 27 B.C. to A.D. 14, the Roman republic came to an end and the Roman empire began. Augustus was its first emperor.

Augustus built a stable government for the empire and undertook economic reforms. He left the senate in place and created an efficient, well-trained civil service to enforce the laws. He cemented the allegiance of cities and provinces to Rome by allowing them a large amount of self-government. To make the tax system more fair, he ordered a census, or population count, of the empire so there would be records of all who should be taxed. He set up a postal service and issued new coins to make trade easier. He put the jobless to work building roads and temples and sent others to farm the land.

Another influential Roman emperor was **Hadrian**. He codified Roman law, making it the same for all provinces. During the golden age of the Pax Romana, or “Roman Peace,” Roman rule brought peace, prosperity, and order to the lands it controlled, from the Euphrates River in the east to Britain in the west.

However, social and economic problems hid beneath the general prosperity. In the A.D. 200s, the Roman empire began to weaken. Rome suffered political and

economic turmoil and a decline in traditional values. The oppressive government and corrupt upper class generated hostility among the lower classes.

**The Empire is Divided** In 284, the emperor **Diocletian** set out to restore order. He divided the empire into two parts. He appointed a co-emperor to rule the western provinces, and he controlled the eastern part, known as the Byzantine Empire. To slow inflation, Diocletian fixed the prices of many goods.

When the emperor **Constantine** came into power, he continued Diocletian’s reforms. In addition, he granted toleration to Christians and moved the empire’s capital to Constantinople, making the eastern empire the center of power.

**The Decline of Rome** These reforms failed to stop the long-term decline of the empire. Nomadic people from Asia, called Huns, were forcing Germanic peoples into Roman territory. By 410, Rome itself was under attack. By then, the empire had surrendered much of its western territories to invaders.

There were several reasons for Rome’s decline, but the primary reason was the many invasions. Rome’s legions were not as strong or as loyal as they had been. As Roman citizens suffered the consequences of a declining empire, patriotism diminished. The Roman



empire finally “fell” in 476, when Germanic invaders captured Rome and ousted the emperor.

**? EXPLAIN** How did Augustus lay the foundation for stable government in the Roman empire?

## The Legacy of Rome

Romans spread their Latin language and Roman civilization to distant lands. At the same time, Roman civilization blended Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman achievements.

**Literature, History, and Philosophy** The greatest Roman authors wrote in Latin. In his epic poem the *Aeneid*, the Roman poet **Virgil** tried to show that Rome was as heroic as Greece. He hoped this tale of Rome’s founding would arouse patriotism and help unite Rome after years of civil wars.

Other writers used poetry to satirize, or make fun of, Roman society. Dramatists wrote many plays, including dramas that built on Roman legends and comedies that portrayed everyday life.

Roman historians recalled Rome’s triumphant past in an attempt to renew patriotism. In philosophy, Roman thinkers were impressed with the Hellenistic

philosophy of Stoicism. Stoics stressed the importance of duty and acceptance of one’s fate.

**Art and Architecture** Like their Greek predecessors, Roman sculptors portrayed their subjects realistically, focusing on every detail. However, the Romans distinguished themselves by also focusing on individual character. Artists depicted scenes from Roman literature and daily life in frescos and mosaics—pictures made from chips of colored stone or glass.

Another distinction that set the Romans apart from the Greeks was their architecture. Unlike the Greeks, the Romans emphasized grandeur. They built immense palaces, temples, and stadiums, which stood as impressive monuments to Roman power. The Romans also improved structures such as columns and arches. Utilizing concrete as a building material, they developed the arched dome as a roof for large spaces.

**Engineering and Science** Romans excelled in engineering, which is the application of science and mathematics to develop useful structures and machines. Roman engineers built roads, bridges, and harbors throughout the empire. They built **aqueducts**, or bridge-like stone structures that carried water from the hills into Roman cities.

In general, the Romans entrusted the Greeks, who were citizens of the empire, with scientific research. Ptolemy, the astronomer-mathematician, proposed his theory that Earth was at the center of the universe. This mistaken idea was accepted in the Western world for nearly 1,500 years.

**The Legacy of Roman Law** Rome was committed to the rule of law and to justice. To protect the empire and its citizens, Rome developed civil law. As Rome expanded, the law of nations was established. This law applied to both citizens and non-citizens of Rome. As Rome extended citizenship across the empire, the two systems merged.

As Roman law developed, certain basic principles evolved. Many of these principles are familiar to Americans today. Among the most important was that an accused person is presumed innocent until proven guilty. A second principle ensured that the accused was allowed to face the accuser and mount a defense. A third idea was that guilt must be firmly established using solid evidence. Still another idea was that judges interpret the laws and make fair decisions.

**? IDENTIFY MAIN IDEAS** How did Roman writers promote patriotism?



>> Attending the theater was a popular pastime in Rome. Here, actors don costumes and masks before a performance.



## The Origins of Christianity

Early in the Pax Romana, Christianity arose in a distant corner of the Roman empire. It grew from a small sect to become the dominant religion of the empire.

**Diverse Religions in the Empire** Within the vast Roman empire, numerous religious beliefs thrived. Generally, Rome tolerated these varied religious traditions. As long as citizens showed loyalty by honoring Roman gods and accepting the divinity of the emperor, they were allowed to worship as they pleased.

Jews in the empire were excused from worshipping Roman gods. However, over time, some Jewish conservatives called on Jews to revolt against Rome. Some Jews also believed a **messiah**, or anointed king sent by God, would appear and lead them to freedom. As rebellion grew, the Romans crushed the rebels, and eventually destroyed the Jewish temple. Thousands of Jews were killed in the fighting and others were enslaved. However, teachers called rabbis preserved Jewish law.

**Life and Teachings of Jesus** Christianity developed as people began to follow the teachings of **Jesus**. Almost all the information we have about the life of Jesus comes from the Gospels, the first four books of the New Testament of the Christian Bible.

According to the Gospels, Jesus was born into a Jewish family in Bethlehem around 4 B.C. At the age of 30, the Gospels relate that Jesus began preaching to large crowds. He recruited 12 **apostles**, or close followers, to help spread his message.

Jesus' teachings were firmly rooted in Jewish tradition. Jesus believed in one God, accepted the Ten Commandments, and preached obedience to the laws of Moses. However, Jesus also preached new beliefs. According to his followers, he called himself the Son of God. Many people believed Jesus was the long-anticipated messiah. Jesus proclaimed that his mission was to bring spiritual salvation and eternal life to anyone who believed in him. He emphasized God's love and the need for justice, morality, forgiveness, and service to others.

According to the Gospels, Jesus was betrayed by one of his disciples and condemned to death by crucifixion, a method of execution frequently used by the Romans. The Gospels report that he was resurrected, or raised from the dead. The Gospels go on to say that Jesus, after commanding his disciples to spread his teachings to all people, ascended into heaven.



>> The Pont du Gard in France was a Roman aqueduct built in 19 B.C. The three tiers of arches rise about 155 feet (47 m).



>> The apostles accompanied Jesus and later spread his teachings.

 [Interactive Gallery](#)



## Spread of Christianity to A.D. 476



**>> Analyze Maps** How did the extent of Christianity in A.D. 325 compare to that in A.D. 476?

**Spread of Christianity** After Jesus' death, the apostles and other followers spread his message. The apostle **Paul** played the most influential role in spreading Christianity. Paul traveled the extensive Roman road network spreading the teachings of Jesus. He explained that Jesus sacrificed his life to atone, or make amends, for the sins of humankind.

However, Rome was not tolerant of Christianity as it was with other religions. Christians often met in secret and, under some Roman rulers, were persecuted. Those that were killed in times of persecution became known as **martyrs**.

Despite these attacks, Christianity continued to spread. In 313, the emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan, which granted freedom of worship to all Roman citizens. Soon after, Theodosius made Christianity the official religion of Rome.

**The Early Christian Church** In time, the scattered Christian communities came together as a structured church. To join the Christian community, a person had to be baptized. Through baptism, a person's sins were forgiven by God.

Each Christian community and its clergy were grouped together as a diocese with a priest. Over the priest presided a bishop, a high Church official. Some bishops of important cities such as Rome, gained greater authority and were given the title of patriarch.

In time, rivalries among the patriarchs grew. In the Latin-speaking west, the bishops of Rome became known as popes. The **popes** claimed authority over all other bishops. The bishops in the Greek-speaking east disagreed. They felt the authority should be shared. The growth of **heresies**, or beliefs said to be contrary to official teachings, also caused divisions in the church.

Early Christians produced many works defining Christian theology. One of the greatest Church scholars was **Augustine**, bishop of Hippo in North Africa. He combined Christian doctrine with Greco-Roman learning, especially the philosophy of Plato.

**? SUMMARIZE** Summarize the main ideas of Jesus' teachings.

## ASSESSMENT

1. **Explain** How did the republic's structure of government change and develop over time?
2. **Draw Conclusions** What factors caused Rome to plunge into civil wars and how did they weaken the republic?
3. **Identify Main Ideas** Why did Diocletian decide to split the empire?
4. **Analyze Information** Give two examples of American legal principles that had their foundation in Roman law.
5. **Trace** What were the historical origins of Christianity, and how did that affect the



>> Augustine was the bishop of Hippo in North Africa. A noted Church scholar, he combined Christian doctrine with the philosophy of Plato.