The Origins of Rome

History tells us little about the Etruscans, the first civilized people to enter Italy around 1000 B.C. Their language remains undeciphered, which makes it difficult to know much about them. Once they settled in Italy, they created a confederacy, or loose union, of cities between 700 and 500 B.C.

During this period of Etruscan influence in central Italy, other Mediterranean people were making their way to Italian shores. The Phoenicians lived along the eastern Mediterranean. They began colonizing extensively after 1000 B.C. far to the west. In 814 B.C., according to tradition, the Phoenicians established a trading city in northern Africa in the modern-day country of Tunisia. The city was called Carthage. (Today it is known as Tunis.)

Carthage became one of the most important Phoenician cities in the Mediterranean. Its location put the Phoenicians within 250 miles of the toe of the Italian Peninsula and only 90 miles from the island of Sicily, just off the coast of Italy.

By the 700s B.C., the Greeks were busy establishing colonies in southern Italy. They created important city-states in that region which became great trading centers. Also during the 8th century, the Greeks and the Carthaginians began colonizing Sicily, each at opposite ends of the large, triangular island.

These three powers—the Etruscans, the Carthaginians, and the Greeks—controlled much of the trade on the Italian Peninsula by the middle of the 700s. During this period, a region south of Etruria known as Latium was home to approximately 30 villages whose inhabitants spoke the same language—Latin. One of these villages was known as Rome. Latium was organized into a defensive alliance known as the Latin League. At this time, Rome was not an important town even in the Latin League.

The origins of Rome are shrouded in myth. Legend has it that the village was founded by orphaned twins, Romulus and Remus, (who were raised by a she-wolf) in the year 753 B.C. However, archeology indicates that the site of Rome was occupied for centuries prior to that date.

By 600 B.C., Rome had developed along the Greek city-state model and was ruled by a chieftain or king known as a rex. The king governed with the help of a council called a senate, which included members from the leading citizens of Rome. The word senate comes from the Latin word senex meaning “old man.”

By the 600s B.C., the Etruscans were dominating the Latin League, including Rome. Rome was greatly influenced by the Etruscans. Deities later identified as Roman gods and goddesses were originally Etruscan. The Romans developed their written language from the Greek, which the Etruscans introduced to them. The Roman monarchy was patterned after the Etruscan government. In particular, the Etruscan military, based on the Greek model of farmer-citizens (known as hoplites) who fought using the phalanx formation, was adopted by the Romans.

Roman society was also based on the Etruscan model. The Romans recognized two classes of citizens: the patricians, or the upper class, and the plebeians, which consisted of the small landowners and tenant farmers (those who worked someone else’s land). These classes remained important in Roman society for hundreds of years to follow.

After approximately a century of Etruscan control of Rome, a group of patricians drove out the last Etruscan ruler and proclaimed Rome an independent republic. The year was 509 B.C. This marked the beginning of a new era for Rome.

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Review and Write

The Etruscans influenced the Romans in many ways. Why do you think Etruscan influence over Rome in the 6th century B.C. is considered so important?
The Roman Republic

For two centuries following the establishment of the Republic, the Romans found themselves almost constantly at war. With the removal of the Etruscan king, other rival city-states, former allies of Rome in the Latin League, tried to take advantage of Rome by invading her territory, putting Rome on the defensive.

In time, Roman forces conquered their neighbors and came to dominate the cities of the Latin League. They did not destroy these cities or even annex them as Roman territory. They made treaties with the conquered towns, permitting them to operate independently in local matters. However, in time of war, Rome expected the Latium cities to provide troops for the Roman army.

With nearly endless sources of troops, Rome continued its conquests throughout Italy. By 400 B.C., Rome prepared to strike against its Etruscan neighbors to the north. However, they were almost too late.

By this time Etruscan power was already in decline. Etruscans had been facing another enemy from the north, the Celts, who had pushed their way into northern Italy as early as 500 B.C. (The Celts had already become dominant in western Europe in modern-day Germany, France, and the British Isles.)

One group of Celts, the Gauls, crossed the Alps into Italy after 500 B.C. and pushed the Etruscans out of the Po River valley in northern Italy. Each passing year brought the Gauls farther south into Etruria. It was during this period of declining Etruscan power that the Romans expanded throughout central Italy.

After 400 B.C., the Romans found themselves faced with a new enemy—the Gauls. On July 16, 390 B.C., a Gallic army defeated the Romans along the banks of the Allia River, just 10 miles north of Rome. (For centuries to follow, the Romans considered July 16 an unlucky day.)

With little opposition, the Gauls marched into Rome and occupied it. The city was looted, burned, and many senators were executed. After occupying much of the city for less than a year, the Gauls were convinced to leave after the Romans paid them 1000 pounds of gold. (Legend says that the Gauls used rigged scales and actually were paid more than 1000 pounds.) Eight centuries passed before Rome was again occupied by a foreign army.

For the remainder of the 300s B.C., Rome’s most dangerous enemies were other Italic people living in central Italy. Chief among them were the Samnites, who lived in Campania, a fertile plain region south of Latium. In 343 B.C., Rome fought the Samnites in a series of wars, and the Romans won. For the first time, the Romans had no powerful enemy in Italy.

By 290 B.C., the Romans controlled all of Italy from the Celtic settlements in the Po Valley to the Greek trading colonies in the south. And after 265, these Greek city-states accepted Roman control.

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Research and Write

The Romans were able to dominate all of Italy because they had a skilled and well-disciplined army. Research the Roman army. Why were Roman soldiers so effective? How were they organized?
Government in Rome

During the centuries of Rome’s expansion throughout the Italian Peninsula, Rome experienced political change as well. With the overthrow of the last of the Etruscan kings, the Romans replaced their monarchy with elected officials called consuls.

Two consuls were elected by a vote of the citizens of the city. These officials ruled at the same time for a year’s term. Generally, the consul candidates were taken from the membership of the Senate, so they came from the ranks of the Roman upper class.

In the 400s B.C., plebeian frustration led to a rebellion which forced the patricians to grant the plebeians political representation. They gained the right to elect a number of representatives called tribunes. Such men had the power to protect the plebeians by vetoing any unlawful or unfair acts passed by the patricians.

Following this plebeian victory, Roman law was codified, or written down in an organized form, for the first time. This written law of Rome was called the Twelve Tables because it was written on 12 wooden tablets. From this period, all Romans understood what the law was and what it said.

In 367 B.C., the plebeians were able to elect their first consul. This broke the patrician monopoly on membership in the Roman Senate since consuls, traditionally, were members of the Senate.

Within a single century, Rome experienced political change which gave new power to the plebeians. However, many of these reforms were not extensive. Rome did not become any more democratic. It remained largely a republic run by an elite oligarchy. As a republic, power was held by a body of citizens, rather than by a king or other single, powerful ruler.

Even though the Roman government was a republic run by an elite group of citizens, religion remained important to the Romans. They believed the state would only be successful with support from the various Roman gods. The government supported priests who carried out official rites and who appealed to the gods for guidance on Rome’s behalf.

Each consul had full power as a chief executive and held judicial power, too. The scope of their power was limited technically only by the right of each to veto the action taken by the other.

Although previously in Rome, power was held in the hands of the aristocratic landowners called patricians; the lower class, or plebeians, began to campaign for more political power.

For good reasons, the plebeians were tired of the patrician-controlled system. For one, the plebeians were forced to serve in the Roman army when needed for active duty, but they did not have the right to hold public office.

Also, in judicial trials and cases, the plebeians often felt discriminated against. Many plebeians did not even know exactly what their individual legal rights and privileges were, since the laws of Rome were not written down. Instead, the patricians retained the privilege of knowing the law and being able to interpret it as they saw fit.

Research and Write

Roman religion was greatly influenced by the Greeks. They had many gods, each of whom had a name and presided over a specific part of the lives of the people. The Romans often adopted a Greek god, changing only his or her name. Identify the Roman name of each of the following Greek deities and what they presided over: Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Hestia, Aphrodite, Ares, Artemis, Athena, Demeter, and Hypnos.
Family Life in Republican Rome

In the Roman Republic, family life was an important part of the culture. Most Roman families considered the father to be the head of the household: What he said, the family did. We call this a patriarchal society, meaning the father makes most of the major decisions. The term patriarchal comes from the Latin words *patria potestas*, meaning “power of the father.”

And his power was extensive. For example, in theory a father always had power over his children as long as he was alive, no matter how old his children were. They could not acquire ownership of property or save any money of their own. They had no legal identification separate from their father. In reality, however, adult children did own personal property and amassed savings, generally with the permission of their father.

Fathers also had power over life and death. By law and tradition, Roman fathers could order the execution of any of their children. This was rarely ordered against adult children. However, it was an acceptable practice to allow an unwanted infant to be exposed to the elements and abandoned to die, if the father did not want the child. This practice was done more often to female infants than male infants because boys were preferred by fathers. Boys could become productive citizens of the state.

A Roman father rarely discussed important issues with his family, including his wife. He did not even discuss important matters pertaining to the family with them. Instead, he had a close circle of friends who were considered his “council,” and he might ask them their opinions about a family matter before making a decision. In this way, family life in Rome was similar to the political processes found in the Roman Republic.

Roman wives abided by the decisions of their husbands. They had little voice in making family decisions and their opinions were not considered important.

Roman girls grew up quickly. Engaged by age 12 after their fathers picked their husbands for them, Roman girls were likely married by age 16 and had children shortly after that. People died young in the Roman Republic, and a woman might find herself widowed by her early twenties.

It was the wife’s duty to keep up the home. A wealthy wife kept busy overseeing servants and making certain the household chores were completed. She watched over her children. A Roman wife might also keep the household records, keeping track of domestic expenses. Entertaining her husband’s friends or accompanying him to public events or private dinners were among her other duties.

Children of wealthy parents were often taught at home by a hired tutor. Formal education began at age seven. School studies included learning to read and write in Latin. Discipline in school was strict. The mother was responsible for teaching her children moral virtues. Children were allowed to play outside the home, often in the streets, playing ball games and other activities.

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**Review and Write**

In 50–100 words, express your opinion of the patriarchal system in Rome. How much authority should a father have over his family?
Roman Religion

During the early days of the Roman Republic, religion gained much importance. It began taking on the form it was to have during the greater part of Roman history.

In many ways, Roman religion was similar to that of the Greeks. Indeed, they borrowed many of the gods of the Greeks (see page 5) and renamed them. These renamed gods and goddesses typically performed the same duties and responsibilities as their Greek equivalents.

Chief among the gods of the Romans was Jupiter (the Greek name was Zeus), the god of the skies. Other gods included Juno (Hera to the Greeks), wife of Jupiter and goddess of marriage; Neptune (Poseidon to the Greeks), god of the waves; Venus (Aphrodite to the Greeks), goddess of love; and Minerva (Athena to the Greeks), goddess of wisdom.

Some of the Greek deities were taken on by the Romans without having their names changed, such as Apollo, god of music, and Pluto, god of the underworld.

Just as the Greeks did, the Romans practiced a religion which did not include much in the way of moral instruction or restrictive laws. Neither religion gave much importance to any rewards or punishments one might receive after death.

For the Romans, as for the Greeks, it was important to gain the favor of the gods to ensure success and security for the individual, as well as for the state. This relationship was called pax deorum, meaning "peace with the gods."

Priests and priestesses were given the responsibility of keeping the gods’ favor. They performed regular rituals and hosted festivals and special sacrifices. Many of these festivals were related to the fertility of Roman fields and other farming activities. Priests might give special prayers to protect farmers and their crops, including prayers against crop disease or failure.

The duties and responsibilities of priests and priestesses were very important to the Romans. Chief among the priests was the pontifex maximus, a Latin title meaning "highest priest." He served as the head of a board of 15 priests who regulated the religion of the Romans.

The pontifex maximus not only had religious power, but also political power. Early in the Roman Republic, the pontifex maximus was seen as the head of the state religion. Many important political leaders in the Republic sought the position of highest priest.

His role became so important that no official state function could begin without first being preceded by a special religious ritual. Even when the Senate met, the first order of business was always religious business.

In time, this connection between religion and the power of the state was to come together in the combination of a powerful ruler who was seen as a god. This did not happen until the collapse of the Roman Republic, when the Roman Empire was founded. Generally, the rulers of the Empire considered themselves to be deities worthy of worship.

Review and Write

In the United States, there is a separation between religion and government. In ancient Rome, the two were connected. Which do you believe to be the better situation: connection or separation between religion and the state? Why?
Expansion and Power in Republican Rome

Through years of war, the Romans were finally able to conquer all the tribes and city-states in Italy by 265 B.C. Everyone—from the Etruscans to the Greeks—had been subjugated by the Romans and were now part of the Republic.

These wars had all proven to be brutal and bloody. When the Roman army conquered a village or state, they frequently made slaves of the defeated people. Those who became Rome’s allies soon began to pay tribute money to the Roman government as a sign of loyalty.

To maintain Roman power outside the region of Latium, the Romans began a policy of colonization. Roman citizens were planted throughout the countryside, creating a permanent presence for Rome in conquered lands. Also, the Romans began building an extensive system of roads and bridges in Italy. This transportation system connected the conquered lands to Rome, allowing the Roman army and Roman traders to move anywhere with relative ease and speed. The result of such construction projects was the unification of the Roman lands into one culture and people. In a short period, Latin became the language of all of Italy.

However, the Greeks still continued to have a serious influence on the Romans. The Romans adopted Greek traditions of art, literature, and music. Even Roman architecture adapted its forms and structures from the Greeks.

During this period in Roman history, the number of citizens living in Rome and other cities in Italy increased dramatically. By 300 B.C., the population of the city of Rome may have stood at 150,000 people. Massive construction projects—temples, stadiums, government buildings—were erected all over the city.

Outside the city, a huge population supported Rome. Modern estimates put the number of people living outside of Rome at nearly 750,000. In addition to this almost one million total population in and around Rome, Italy may have been home to another three million people.

Much of the land controlled by the Roman Republic in Italy was public property, open to any Roman for use in grazing sheep or cattle. However, in time, the patricians of the Republic (aristocrats who were landowners) took control of larger tracts of land for their own private use. Since Rome controlled by then over 50,000 square miles of territory, land grabs by patricians were common and extensive. Often such control of formerly public lands was sanctioned by the Senate, which was the political haven of the patricians.

So important was land ownership in Republican Rome that it was the chief means of gaining prestige. All other forms of wealth were considered less important. Someone who made his fortune by engaging in business or trade was looked down on by the patricians. They considered businessmen inferior to themselves.

In fact, by the end of the 3rd century B.C., Roman senators and their sons were forbidden by law to engage in foreign trade. As a result, despite how wealthy a businessman might become, he was still considered a lesser to the patricians. All this led to a class rivalry that we shall see later in our study.

Review and Write

1. Why were extensive roads important in the Roman Republic?

2. Why do you think the patricians considered it so important to own large tracts of land?
Once the Romans completed their wars of conquest across the Italian Peninsula, they found themselves facing opposition from outside Italy. After acquiring the Greek colonies of southern Italy, for example, the Romans found themselves in control of the island of Sicily, off the coast of the toe of the Italian boot. (Sicily was the site of both Greek colonies and trading posts occupied by the Carthaginians.)

With their takeover of Greek trade colonies in Sicily, the Romans inherited a long-standing rivalry between the Greeks and the Carthaginians. This competition led the Romans to fight a series of wars with the Phoenicians of Carthage. Since the Romans referred to the Carthaginians as the Punici, their word for Phoenicians, the wars became known as the Punic Wars. In all, the Romans fought three such wars with the Carthaginians over a 120-year period.

The Carthaginians were a formidable foe. As a Phoenician colony located in modern-day Tunisia, Carthage was the centerpiece of an extensive trading empire which stretched throughout the entire western Mediterranean Sea. Founded around 800 B.C., the colony and its satellites had been doing business for hundreds of years prior to the rise of the Romans.

In fact, business was such an important part of life in the Carthaginian Empire, that the government of the city-state was an oligarchy, consisting of 30 royal merchants who served as the power base of the Carthaginian Senate.

The civilization established by the Carthaginians was one based on prosperity and luxury. The Phoenician religion, however, had a reputation for the gruesome practice of child sacrifice. Such rituals involved the unthinkable acts of slicing the throats of infants and young children, placing them on an altar, and then dropping the bodies into a fire dedicated to a Phoenician-Canaanite god. All this took place at a holy site called a tophet, which was a combination temple altar and fiery furnace.

The First Punic War began in 264 B.C. with the invasion of the Roman army onto the island of Sicily, following an appeal from the city-state of Messana. There the Romans engaged the Carthaginians in battle. This first of the Punic Wars was to last an entire generation, covering the years from 264–241 B.C.

To ensure an ultimate victory in this war, the Roman Senate was prepared to spend as much money as it might take and sacrifice as many troops as needed. As a result, Roman losses against the Carthaginians were staggering: at least 250,000 men and 500 ships were lost by the Romans in this single Punic war.

But victory did come. With it, the Romans gained control of the island of Sicily. In addition, the Carthaginians were forced to pay war damages to the Romans amounting to millions of dollars in silver. With the annexation of Sicily, the Romans were later able to take over from Carthage the neighboring islands of Sardinia and Corsica.

Within a generation of the end of the First Punic War, the Romans conquered additional territory in northern Italy. In 222 B.C., a Roman army defeated the Gauls in the Cisalpine region, north of the Po River.

Within 50 years, the Romans had extended their power considerably. They controlled, by the end of the 3rd century B.C., 120,000 square miles of territory, extending from southern Italy to the Alpine region, as well as the Mediterranean islands of Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica.

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Review and Write

Describe the culture and society of Carthage on the eve of the First Punic War.
A Defeated Carthage Rebuilds

During the First Punic War, the Carthaginians suffered because they could not find a strong, capable general who could win battles against the Romans—not until the rise of a general named Hamilcar Barca (huh MIL kahr BAHR kuhr). Hamilcar was made leader of a Carthaginian army in Sicily in 248 B.C. and fought brilliantly. If only he had been born sooner, the Carthaginians might have won their war with the Romans.

For years, Hamilcar fought the Romans successfully, never losing a land battle to them. He raid ed the Italian coast repeatedly and dashed across Sicily so swiftly that the Romans had trouble keeping up with his whereabouts.

However, ultimately, the Romans won the war even though they never defeated Hamilcar. They defeated the Carthaginian naval fleet in 242 B.C., forcing an end to the war. Hamilcar himself helped negotiate the peace in 241, bringing the First Punic War to its conclusion.

Despite Carthage's defeat in this war, General Hamilcar never forgot that he had not lost a battle to the Romans. His hatred of the Romans continued long after the First Punic War was over. As Rome continued its expansion into the Mediterranean Sea after the end of the war, it targeted and gained control of the islands of Corsica and Sardinia. This was only possible for Rome to accomplish as long as Carthage was weak.

With the threat of Rome growing even after the end of the First Punic War, Hamilcar soon realized that Carthage would have to fight Rome a second time. But Carthage would need to be strengthened. To ensure a stronger Carthage, Hamilcar placed himself in Spain to lead an expedition. Hamilcar's army expanded Carthaginian power in southern Spain. He established new cities, such as Barcino (BAHR shi noh), which he named for himself. Today, it is known as the city of Barcelona. However, in 228 B.C., his campaigns were cut short with his death.

A son-in-law to Hamilcar, Hasdrubal (HAS droo bal) continued where his father-in-law had left off. He extended Carthaginian control over additional Spanish tribes. He founded a city which he named Cartago Nova. In Latin, it meant "New Carthage." (Today, the city is known as Cartagena.)

Through these years, the Romans were preoccupied with their own campaigns in Italy, especially in the Cisalpine Gaul region. They did not pay much attention to what the Carthaginians were doing in Spain. By the time they realized that Carthage had once again become a powerful force in the Mediterranean, it was nearly too late.

Rome did manage to force Hasdrubal to agree to limit Carthaginian power in Spain to the region south of the Ebro River. The Carthaginians also agreed to allow independence to the Greek city-state of Saguntum (suh GUN tum), which was located 80 miles south of the Ebro.

The threat of Hasdrubal was soon eliminated, however. In 221 B.C., he was assassinated. In his place, another Carthaginian general rose to the front. He was the son of Hamilcar Barca. His name was Hannibal.

From his youth, Hannibal had been taught to hate the Romans. As a boy, his father had taken him to Spain on a military campaign. Raised in the art of war, Hannibal became a skilled soldier and leader. He would prove to be a great challenge to the Romans in the years ahead.

Although only 26 years old when Hamilcar died, Hannibal assumed control of Carthaginian forces in Spain. In 219 B.C., despite early Carthaginian promises to the Romans, Hannibal began to lay siege to the city of Saguntum. When Saguntum appealed to the Romans for help against the Carthaginians, the Roman Senate responded immediately. In a short time, this conflict between Rome and Hannibal escalated into the Second Punic War.
The Second Punic War Begins

When Saguntum fell to Hannibal in 219 B.C. following an eight-month siege, the Romans sent a delegation to him to protest the military takeover of the city. Hannibal treated them with disrespect and refused to respond to their concerns.

The Romans responded with war. With the outbreak of the Second Punic War in 218 B.C., Hannibal was prepared to do battle with the Romans. He began developing a strategy which was to take him to Italy where he nearly brought about the destruction of the city of Rome itself.

Hannibal amassed a huge army of over 90,000 men and began a lengthy march from Spain to Italy. Accompanying Hannibal's army were 40 elephants, which he used to carry supplies and equipment.

Hannibal crossed over the Ebro River in the fall of 218 B.C. and headed north. He knew the Romans were expecting him to sail his forces to northern Italy and they sent an army there to meet him. However, Hannibal decided to take his forces by land through the high, snow-covered mountains known as the Alps.

Hannibal's campaign was a treacherous one. His army was unaccustomed to the cold and snow of the mountains of south-central Europe. Thousands of Hannibal's men succumbed to the wintery weather. To protect his elephants from the cold, Hannibal had special woolen blankets to cover them. Tribes of warriors native to the Alpine region fought Hannibal as he worked his way through the many snowy mountain passes.

This campaign proved nearly disastrous to Hannibal. All of his elephants died except one. The trek through the Alps took many months. Only one out of three of the men who began this campaign remained alive when Hannibal's forces emerged from the mountains into northern Italy. There he met 26,000 Roman forces and defeated them.

His greatest victory came in 216 B.C. when he defeated the Romans in the battle of Cannae, located south of Rome on the Adriatic coast. Thirty thousand Romans lost their lives at Cannae. Although this was an important victory for Hannibal, it did not bring about absolute defeat for the Romans.

For the next 15 years, Hannibal campaigned throughout Italy, ravaging the Italian Peninsula and defeating the Romans in battle repeatedly. In 211 B.C., Hannibal's army came to within one mile of the city of Rome, but never saw it fall.

Map Exercise

On the map, draw a line showing the route Hannibal took from Spain to Italy. Then locate the following on the map: the Ebro River, Saguntum, Carthago Nova, Carthage, Rome, Cannae, the Alps, the Mediterranean Sea, the Po River, Sicily, Corsica, and Sardinia.
The Roman Republic Faces Challenges

An era of great change occurred in Rome following the end of the Third Punic War (149–146 B.C.) to about 30 B.C. It was an era of war, political strife, revolt, assassination, and much social conflict.

One of the major political and social class conflicts of the period occurred in the second half of the 2nd century B.C. For many years prior, the patricians had ruled Rome through the Senate. In 133 B.C., a conflict of power arose when two brothers, Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, proposed granting land to those who did not have it. (They were the grandchildren of Scipio.) These two were members of the Senate and were of the patrician class. However, they were responding to a loud cry from the plebeians for greater social and economic reform in Rome.

When Tiberius Gracchus was elected as tribune, he proposed a law restricting the amount of land any single patrician could own. But the move was vetoed by the patrician-controlled Senate. Tiberius became so unpopular that he was killed by mob violence brought about with Senate support.

His brother, Gaius, would later take up Tiberius’s cause. In 123 B.C., Gaius was himself elected as tribune of Rome and re-elected in 122 (even though no one was to serve as tribune for two years in a row). He was soon enacting legislation designed to help the poor. In time, the Roman Senate turned on him, killing Gaius and 3000 of his supporters.

With the deaths of the Gracchi brothers, Rome was in political turmoil. In their places, two military leaders stepped forward and made themselves rulers of Rome. The first was a general named Marius, who was elected as consul by the plebeian party in 107 B.C. He was elected for six consecutive years.

The election of Marius to office started an era in Roman history which took Rome from a Republic to a military dictatorship. Despite Marius’s military power, he accomplished little politically. He did, however, reorganize the Roman army. This move proved an important step in changing Roman history.

Marius was the first Roman general to allow men without property to become Roman soldiers. Traditionally, only citizens who owned property had been soldiers. Since they had no ownership of Roman property, these soldiers became loyal to Marius first and Rome second.

After his death in 86 B.C., the patricians once again took control of Roman affairs. They appointed another general to power—one who was loyal to them. In 82 B.C., Sulla, a Roman general known for his foreign victories became dictator.

Sulla set about killing all those who opposed him or the Senate which installed him in power. He was even able to reduce the power of the elected tribunes. After a three-year campaign of securing dictatorial power, Sulla retired to his luxurious country villa and its expansive lands where he died the next year in 78 B.C.

Now the patricians had a new level of power in Rome. But they would not go unchallenged. Several new leaders rose to prominence on behalf of the people. Among them were two generals: Gnaeus Pompeius (pom PEE us), known as Pompey (106–48 B.C.), and Julius Caesar (100–44 B.C.). Through their efforts, the Roman Republic was doomed to come to an end.

Review and Write

1. From what you have read here, do you feel the Roman Senate had too much power? Why?

2. Why was it an important change that Roman soldiers no longer had to own property to serve in the military by the beginning of the 1st century B.C.?

3. What reforms did the Gracchi brothers institute after the Third Punic War?
The First Triumvirate

Both Roman generals, Marius and Sulla, used their military power for personal gain in the 80s and 70s B.C. After their deaths, other generals came to the front, claiming power for themselves as well.

One such general was Pompey (106–48 B.C.), who fought alongside Sulla earlier in his career against pro-Marius forces in Sicily. Pompey’s military career continued after the death of his friend. In 77 B.C., he fought an anti-Sulla general named Marcus Aemilius Lepidus (LIP ih dus) and defeated him.

When Lepidus fled to Spain, Pompey began a campaign there to rout out Lepidus and other anti-Sulla forces. Even though Lepidus died shortly after reaching Spain, Pompey found himself facing another rival, Roman general Sertorius, who defeated him. This might have been the end of Pompey’s career, but other events saved him. Sertorius was assassinated in 72 B.C. Although Pompey was not involved in the plot, the forces supporting Sertorius in Spain collapsed after his death. Pompey was hailed as the winner of the Spanish struggle. His star was once again on the rise.

At the same time that Pompey was making his name well known within the Roman Republic, another general, Marcus Licinius Crassus, was busy fighting rebellious slaves in Italy led by a slave-gladiator named Spartacus. By 71 B.C., Crassus and his army defeated Spartacus and his followers.

Now two Roman generals, Pompey and Crassus, had created reputations for themselves and had armies loyal to them, ready to follow them anywhere. Pompey and Crassus knew and respected one another. Between them, they saw an opportunity to take control of political events in Rome. In 70 B.C., they marched on Rome with their troops and seized the office of consul for themselves. Despite Pompey’s former support of Sulla, these two began to systematically destroy any reforms which Sulla had brought to the Republic and to the city of Rome. They worked to make the Senate a weak body with no real power. All this meant more power for the plebeians in Rome and less for the aristocratic patricians.

Over the next 10 years, Pompey carried out important military campaigns throughout the Mediterranean region. His successes made him the hero of Rome as tribute money flowed into the city from those whom Pompey conquered. In short order, he brought the entire eastern Mediterranean region under Roman control, defeating enemies in Syria, Judea, and Armenia.

Meanwhile, Crassus remained in Rome making himself a powerful political figure and controlling the politics of the Senate. As Pompey achieved further success on the battlefield, Crassus came to consider him an enemy. When Pompey returned to Rome in 62 B.C., Crassus wielded so much political power that the Senate refused to reward Pompey and his army with the land grants Pompey requested.

Disappointed, Pompey burned for revenge against the Senate. But he had already disbanded his army, expecting his requests to be accepted by the Senate.

Fresh from a military campaign of his own in Spain, a young general named Julius Caesar sought an ally in Pompey. He suggested that Pompey, and Crassus (a friend of Caesar’s) join forces. Despite the differences between Pompey and Crassus, Pompey agreed.

Soon these three powerful men—all successful Roman generals—formed an alliance called the First Triumvirate, from the Latin meaning “three men.” Among them, they found themselves in control of Rome. But their alliance would not last more than a few years.

Review and Write

Marius, Sulla, Pompey, Crassus, Caesar: Each of these generals seized power in Rome at one time or another. Is it important that they were generals? Explain.
The Life and Death of Julius Caesar

When Pompey, Crassus and Julius Caesar formed their triumvirate, they said publicly it was for the people of Rome. They spoke of their concern for the plight of the common people of the Republic.

It was a time when the city of Rome faced many problems. Its population had grown to approximately one million people, many of whom were unemployed. Such people were given regular allotments of bread and grain provided by the government. Hundreds of thousands of people in Rome lived in crowded slums. It was a time when the Roman Republic needed strong leadership that was interested in the people.

However, each man entered the three-way alliance for selfish reasons. Pompey wanted land for himself and his troops, and titles over the lands he conquered in the east. Crassus wanted financial profits and more political power. Caesar wanted to be consul of Rome and to win glory, fame, and wealth through his military campaigns.

Each of the three men of the Triumvirate understood that their alliance was a shaky one which would last only as long as all three profited in some way. Sometimes they went to unusual lengths to keep their alliance intact. For example, Caesar gave his only daughter to Pompey for his wife. Thus, marriage brought the two families together politically, at least until her death during childbirth in 54 B.C. After that, the two men did not cooperate with one another.

Over time, Julius Caesar seemed destined to dominate the Roman world. For 10 years, beginning in 58 B.C., Julius campaigned in western Europe, fighting Celts, Gauls, and other barbarians on behalf of the Roman Republic. Through his military successes, he expanded the territorial borders of Rome into portions of modern-day France, Germany, and even to the British Isles.

With every passing year and military victory, Caesar’s enemies began to look at him with fear and hatred. His political supporters in Rome began organizing into gangs of young men who roamed the streets of the city looking for rivals whom they beat or murdered. In 53 B.C., so much street violence was taking place that no elections could be held. Thus, no consuls were selected that year.

In that same year, Crassus died during a military campaign in northern Mesopotamia. With bonds between Pompey and Caesar already broken, the Triumvirate was no more. Pompey campaigned for complete political power in Rome and was appointed the only consul (tradition had always required two) of the Republic.

By 49 B.C., a victorious General Julius Caesar began making his way back home. He was ready to take power in Rome. When the Senate—filled with Pompey supporters—ordered Caesar to step down from command of his army, he refused.

After he defeated his enemy Pompey in 48 B.C. at the battle of Pharsalus in Greece, Caesar pursued him into Egypt. There, Pompey was killed by ministers of the boy-king, Ptolemy XIII, an ally of Pompey’s. After Caesar defeated Ptolemy’s army in Egypt, he allied himself with Ptolemy’s sister, Queen Cleopatra VII. Before the year was over, Caesar made himself dictator of Rome.

After four years of continuing military campaigns in North Africa and Spain, Caesar finally returned to Rome. On March 15, 44 B.C., he was assassinated by a conspiracy of senators who stabbed him on the Senate floor, his bloody body coming to rest at the foot of a statue of Pompey, his old rival.
The Second Triumvirate

Before his death by assassination in 44 B.C., Julius Caesar ruled over the Roman Republic with great power. Although he acted dictatorially, he did not like to think of himself as an autocrat. "I am not a king," he often said of himself.

In fact, in the final years of his life when he was virtual dictator of Rome, he was rarely in the city at all. During the three years prior to his assassination, Caesar was only in Rome twice for any length of time, a total of about eight months.

However, his rule did bring stability and growth to Rome. He reduced the long-standing debts of the Republic and limited the number of Romans who qualified for free bread. He replaced dishonest governors with honest appointees. Rome witnessed great building projects during the years of Caesarean rule, including the construction of public libraries and an extensive canal across the Isthmus of Corinth. He extended citizenship to many non-Romans. Caesar also allowed for non-Italians to be members of the Senate and expanded the Senate's membership from 600 to 900 members.

One of his most far-reaching reforms for Rome was the regularization the Roman calendar. To do so, he adopted an ancient Egyptian calendar based on a 365-day year, plus an extra day every four years. This eliminated much confusion regarding dates which had plagued the Republic for hundreds of years.

For all his successes, Caesar made his political opponents jealous, which led to his death at their hands. Chaos and confusion followed. Rioting even broke out during Caesar's funeral as the Roman people protested the death of their hero at the hands of the Senate.

A political struggle soon developed, centering on three men: Mark Antony, a Roman consul and friend of Julius Caesar; Marcus Lepidus, a Roman general; and Gaius Octavianus (known as Octavian), great nephew and heir to Julius Caesar. For awhile, the three formed a Second Triumvirate, bringing their power together and seeing to the deaths of 300 senators implicated in Caesar's death. When the two main conspirators, Brutus and Cassius, fled to the Near East, Antony and Octavian raised armies against them and defeated them in the battle of Philippi in 42 B.C., leading to their respective suicides.

After Philippi, the Triumvirate divided Rome's territories among themselves. Rivalry soon caused them to battle one another. After Octavian defeated Lepidus, he moved his army against Mark Antony, who had allied himself with Queen Cleopatra of Egypt whose navy was formidable. By 31 B.C., Octavian's forces defeated Antony and Cleopatra, leading to their dual suicides.

Now Octavian ruled Rome unrivaled. In 27 B.C. the Senate, fearful of him, gave him great honors, bestowing on him the title Augustus, meaning "venerable or revered one." He ruled as the first emperor of Rome. Now known as Augustus Caesar, Octavian ruled brilliantly for 45 years from 31 B.C. to A.D. 14. He introduced many reforms. Rome was no longer a limited republic; it was an empire.

Review and Write

1. Both Julius and Augustus Caesar ruled as dictators over Rome, but they ruled effectively as reformers. Do you think this justifies their autocratic control? Explain.

2. From your reading of this page, list any reforms or successes accomplished by Julius Caesar during his period of rule.

3. Describe the power struggle which occurred in Rome after the death of Julius Caesar.

4. How was Rome different after Octavian came to power as Augustus Caesar in 31 B.C.?
The Life of Jesus Christ

During the centuries of Roman domination in the Mediterranean region and beyond, many religious sects existed within the Republic and later the Empire. A new religion was created after the death of a man in A.D. 29 who lived in Palestine, located on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. His name was Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus the Christ (from the Greek word Χριστός, meaning “savior”) was the founder of a religion which became known as Christianity.

Today, Christians are found all over the world. Hundreds of millions of people today follow the teachings of Jesus. Even after many of the religions founded in the Roman Empire died out, Christianity survived.

Jesus of Nazareth was born, perhaps, as early as 4 B.C. and died in A.D. 29. This may seem odd when you consider that we have been using the initials B.C. in this study to refer to the years and centuries prior to Jesus’ birth. That might suggest that Jesus was born in the year 0, but those who created the modern calendar miscalculated the years, accidentally placing Jesus’ birth four years later than it probably was.

Born during the reign of Augustus Caesar, Jesus grew up in Nazareth, a town in the Galilean region of Judea. He began his career as a teacher and healer. We know only a few events in the life of Jesus prior to his death through a series of four short books known as the Four Gospels.

According to tradition, these books were written by four of Jesus’ followers. Jesus had 12 men called apostles who served him during his three-year preaching ministry. Four of them—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—wrote about their experiences with Jesus. Historians date the Four Gospels between A.D. 70 and 90.

Jesus began his preaching ministry at about age 30. For three years, he preached all over Judea, including in the city of Jerusalem. Not only did he preach a simple message, Jesus also healed the sick and cast out evil spirits from possessed victims.

Jesus often spoke to large crowds of poor people, many of whom were illiterate. Perhaps for this reason, he often used short stories, called parables, to get his message across. Such stories humanized his message and gave the people simple structures explaining his purpose.

Basically, Jesus’ message incorporated all of the following themes: 1) God (the Hebrew Yahweh) is the father of all humankind; 2) forgiveness and love should be expressed even to one’s enemies; 3) “do unto others as you would have others do unto you”; 4) pay back evil with good; 5) avoid all hypocrisy; 6) forego religious ceremony, ritual, and meaningless tradition; 7) believe in the coming of God’s kingdom; and 8) believe in the final Judgment when all the dead will be brought back to life and be rewarded or punished with either Heaven or Hell.

Some of these messages were often veiled by Jesus, which led some people to misunderstand his message. Certain of his followers and his enemies thought that when he spoke of the “kingdom of God,” Jesus meant an earthly political kingdom. His enemies used these words against him, causing him to be arrested in Jerusalem, tried by a Jewish court, and sentenced by a Roman leader to be executed by crucifixion—the common means of state execution carried out by Rome in A.D. 29 or perhaps 30.

According to the Gospels, after Jesus’ death, he arose and lived again. Those who followed him in life continued to preach his message, leading to the establishment of a new faith based on his life, his example, and his claim to have been the Son of God. Before the end of the 1st century A.D., Christians could be found all over the Roman Empire. By the 300s A.D., Christianity became the official state religion of Rome.

Review and Write

What significant impact do you think the life of Jesus had or continues to have on world history?
The Spread of Christianity

With the death of Jesus of Nazareth, his critics and enemies believed they had destroyed his message for all time. However, they were mistaken. His followers continued preaching his message. Reports began to circulate that Jesus had been seen after his crucifixion and that he had spoken to his followers. However, there were not many converts to the new religion based on Jesus’ ministry immediately after his death. Palestine was the center of the Jewish religion known as Judaism, and many Jews did not believe Jesus to be their savior, the Messiah spoken of by their early prophets.

Early Christianity did take root elsewhere among Hellenistic Jews living outside of Palestine. They were more open to new ideas and less committed to the traditional teachings of Judaism. As a result, early Christians found converts in the Jewish communities of such cities as Athens, Antioch, Corinth, and even Rome.

Although Jesus had limited his message to the Jewish people, in a short time, others were preaching his themes to non-Jews. According to Christian scripture, the Apostle Peter, one of Jesus’ 12 immediate followers, began this process.

But another man, known as Saul of Tarsus, was also instrumental in taking the Christian message to non-Jews. Later known as Paul, he was raised in a Hellenistic city in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), and was well-versed in the Jewish faith, Greek thought, and Hellenistic literature. Paul had first fought against the spread of Jesus’ followers after his death, but was later converted to Christianity himself.

Paul took Jesus’ message out of Palestine through well-organized missionary trips throughout the eastern portion of the Roman Empire. He preached to and converted Hellenistic Jews and many non-Jews, called Gentiles, who were themselves disenchanted with pagan cults and the state religion of the Empire, which required the worship of the emperor as a deity. Paul was also the writer of many of the books or letters which make up the modern New Testament. His ministry was crucial to the spread of Christianity. After preaching for several decades, Paul was eventually condemned by the Roman state, and was executed around the year A.D. 65.

Rome came to take a hard line toward the early Church because Roman leaders believed it threatened the power of the Empire. Emperor worship was considered an essential act of patriotism for all Roman citizens. Christians, however, refused to take part in such ceremonies. Therefore, to the Romans, Christians were traitors. In addition, many Christians refused to serve in the Roman army.

Despite their dislike for Christianity, Roman officials did not pass a single law specifically forbidding it. Christians were persecuted periodically by Imperial decree, however. Such persecutions sometimes led to Christians being killed during Roman sporting events.

By the end of the 3rd century A.D., such persecutions came to an end, having failed to destroy the Christian faith. In A.D. 313, Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity throughout the Empire. By 395, Emperor Theodosius declared Christianity to be the sole religion of the Roman Empire.

Review and Write

1. Why was the Apostle Paul so important in the spread of early Christianity?

2. From where did early Christianity find its first followers?

3. What cities became important centers of early Christianity?
Good and Bad Emperors

As a ruler of the Roman Empire, Augustus was a brilliant leader. His reforms of the Roman bureaucracy were extensive. While he took on great power for himself, he was not corrupted by it. Concerning his personal life, Augustus was a moderate man. He helped pass laws within the Empire designed to discourage such vices as gambling, drinking, idleness, and sexual irregularities, as well as divorce and luxury.

However, upon his death in A.D. 14, he was followed by a series of emperors who often brought limited skills and a mixed ethos to the leadership of Rome.

Augustus was followed by four descendants of his family line, the Julio-Claudians, who ruled over the Empire from A.D. 14 to 68. His stepson, Tiberius (A.D. 14–37) was a capable and conscientious ruler who balanced the imperial budget during his reign. His grandnephew, Caligula (A.D. 37–41) was a vicious young man who was probably insane. Caligula once made one of his special horses a consul of Rome. He was assassinated by his own palace guard.

A nephew of Tiberius, Claudius (A.D. 41–54) was a fairly capable ruler. He extended Roman power into Britain beginning in A.D. 43, after a Roman army defeated the Celts. He also extended Roman citizenship to more people.

Unfortunately, Claudius married his own niece Agrippina who conspired against him and had him murdered, which allowed the Empire to pass to her 16-year-old son, Nero. His legacy is one of good and bad. To maintain power, he ordered his mother killed and murdered his wife, and he was known for persecuting Christians.

However, Nero did reduce taxes, built up the economy, and was generally kind to the people within the Empire. He did not waste money on expensive military campaigns.

In A.D. 64, a great fire broke out in Rome. Although some Roman historians blame Nero for setting the fire, which destroyed much of the city, he was not responsible. In fact, he was at his villa outside the city when the fire occurred.

In the final years of his reign, Nero became personally licentious. His reputation for gross sexuality and drunkenness became commonplace. He spent needless sums on extravagant banquets and orgies. His enemies—including the Senate—turned on him in A.D. 68. A death warrant was issued by leading senators. Nero, however, committed suicide. With his death, the Julio-Claudian line came to an end.

After a power struggle between four men seeking the throne, Flavius Vespasianus (A.D. 69–79) (known as Vespasian) rose to power. He established a new line, the Flavian dynasty, which ruled over Rome from A.D. 69–96. During Vespasian's reign, the great Coliseum, a massive sports arena, underwent construction. Also, the Romans campaigned against a Jewish revolt, destroying the city of Jerusalem.

Following Vespasian, his two sons—Titus (A.D. 79–81) and Domitian (A.D. 81–96) ruled, followed by the reigns of the men known as the Five Good Emperors. This new dynasty—the Antonine line—brought the Roman Empire to new heights.

Two of the five emperors were extraordinary. Hadrian (A.D. 117–138) established new towns in the Empire and restored old ones. Many public works projects were built. Hadrian also reformed the slavery system, making it illegal for a master to put his own slave to death.

Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 161–180) was the last of the “good” emperors. He was a remarkable administrator, chief executive, and scholar. He loved philosophy, and wrote a book titled Meditations. He was extremely devoted to the Empire and served it well.

Review and Write

What do you think it required to be considered a “good” emperor of the Roman Empire? From what you have read here, what made some emperors “good” and some “bad”?
The Coliseum: Arena of Blood

Today, near the center of the city of Rome, stand the ruins of a great amphitheater dating from the 1st century A.D. It was known as the Coliseum or the Flavian Amphitheater, since it was constructed during the reigns of two Flavian emperors, Vespasian and his son, Titus. The Coliseum is considered one of the best examples of Roman architecture. It was also the scene of many horrific sporting events, which often resulted in death.

The Coliseum was built to seat 45,000 spectators. There was also room among the stadium’s four levels to accommodate an additional 5000. The seating was tiered, set on sloping concrete columns, similar to the way modern sports complexes are constructed today. Spectators could enter the Coliseum through 80 different entrances, which allowed the stadium to be filled and emptied without too much delay or crush.

This immense building stands 161 feet high, is 600 feet long (as long as two football fields), and 500 feet wide. The stadium consists of many half-columns which form arches running along the exterior. Huge canvas awnings shaded the crowd; sometimes a giant canvas was stretched over the top of the facility to block the midday sun.

Inside the Coliseum, where the sporting events took place, is a great oval-shaped arena. Although the floor is no longer in place today, originally the stadium could be flooded to allow for water events, such as mock sea battles, held for the amusement of the crowd. Later, facilities were constructed beneath the Coliseum floor, including cages for wild animals and other victims, as well as “locker rooms” for gladiatorial contestants.

Anyone wanting to watch the games held in the Coliseum had plenty of opportunities during the year. The Roman calendar was full of official, state-sanctioned holidays. During the reign of Emperor Claudius (A.D. 41–54), 93 days were established as game days. By the second half of the 4th century A.D., the number of game days had been increased to 175, nearly half of the year!

A typical Coliseum event might begin with the gladiators entering the arena in chariots, each warrior dressed in a purple and gold robe. Gladiators were then paired off after casting lots (the Roman equivalent of flipping a coin), and the games began.

Often those who fought in the games were professionally-trained fighters who attended special schools to learn the combative arts. Life for the gladiators was harsh. In the 2nd century A.D., gladiators attended the Ludus Magnus, a Roman training school. There they slept in rough barracks with no comforts. Because many gladiators were slaves, sold for just such a purpose, guards were posted to keep the trainees from escaping. During training sessions, any combatant who tried to stay out of the fight was whipped or burned with a red-hot iron to force him into the fight.

The weapons used by the gladiators included swords, spears, tridents, nets, and shields. If a combatant was wounded, the crowd often had the power to call for his death if it suited them. A gladiator whose wounds were considered mortal was approached by someone dressed as Charon, ferryman of the underworld, who, wielding a huge mallet, smashed the head of the dying fighter.

Review and Write

What is the most brutal sport held in modern arenas today? Why do you think the Roman games were so harsh, even to the point of killing?
Christianity Takes Root

During the final centuries of the Roman Empire, when the political, economic, and military systems of Rome were slowly falling into chaos, Christianity was gaining more of a following. As life in the Roman system became an increasing struggle and life within the Empire became less secure, people turned to the teachings of the Christians for their answers.

Ironically, the existence of the Roman Empire had, in part, made possible the growth of Christianity into a world religion. The faith it inspired caused its followers and converts to teach others with enthusiasm. Even when early Christians faced death through official Roman persecutions, the thrust of Christianity was not lessened.

The early Church had always stressed the role of the individual. Only after hundreds of years did Christianity develop an involved system of priests and church fathers. Preachers and missionaries, such as the Apostle Paul, moved about from congregation to congregation, delivering sermons and giving advice.

The only organized leadership of the early Church was in the form of elders, men of age who served a local body of believers. Sometimes called bishops, overseers, or presbyters, these appointed church leaders were considered shepherds to their flock, a single group of Christians.

By the 2nd century A.D., the titles of bishop and presbyter had been separated into two roles. The local leaders were called presbyters or elders; a leader in a large church group in a city, for example, was called a bishop. The bishops were responsible to the congregations in the vicinity of their mother church. In time, the region administered by a church bishop was called a diocese, after the Roman name used to identify a territorial administrative division of the Empire. Other Church structures were adapted from the Romans. A number of dioceses constituted a province of the Empire. In the Church, a province came to be administered by an archbishop.

Provinces were combined into administrative units called patriarchates. This gave rise to the church office called a patriarch. Only a handful of patriarchs existed in the Church of the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D. Patriarchs served the Church in the larger cities of Rome, Jerusalem, Constantinople, Antioch, and Alexandria, for example.

Among these leading patriarchs, the one located in Rome eventually claimed more importance than those in other cities. Somewhere in the 4th or 5th century A.D., the Roman patriarch became the recognized leader of the Church and took on the title of pope, from the Greek word for “father.”

Despite such claims of the patriarch in Rome, other patriarchs did not always agree with his claim. In the eastern half of the Roman Empire, especially in Constantinople, the patriarch never accepted the supremacy of Rome’s pope.

After the official split of the Roman Empire into two halves—East Rome and West Rome—the patriarchs in Rome and Constantinople went their separate ways. The patriarch in Rome was destined to be the pope of the Roman Catholic Church, while the patriarch in Constantinople would become the leader of the Orthodox Church.

Today, Christianity recognizes many different structures and belief systems within the bodies of those who follow the teachings of Jesus. There are still important differences which persist between the patriarch of the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic leader called the pope.

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Review and Write

Why do you think the political divisions of the Roman Empire were used to create a hierarchy of leaders for the early Church?
The Dividing of the Roman Empire

Many problems continued to plague the Roman Empire throughout the decades of the 3rd and 4th centuries. In A.D. 285, however, one emperor, Diocletian (die o KLEE shun) helped to bring the long decline nearly to a halt.

Diocletian ruled for 30 years, from 285 to 305. Diocletian brought civil war to an end and worked hard to reorganize the Empire into a well-run, effective state. He did not restore the power of the Senate, however. Instead he completed the process of reducing the power of the long-standing body to that of a town council. Diocletian created a splendid court for himself, ordering all to refer to him as “the most sacred lord.”

In reorganizing the Empire, Diocletian decided that one problem in providing security and stability within the state was that it was far too large and unwieldy. No one man could rule efficiently. So he divided it into two halves. The eastern half he kept for his own rule. In the western half, he established a co-ruler called an Augustus. Both men were to rule together.

Next, Diocletian ordered each of the two co-rulers to select his own fellow ruler, a number-two-man, called a Caesar. This step made certain that a successor for every Augustus was always there to take over, which would, hopefully, bring all power struggles to an end.

His next step in reorganizing the Empire was to establish an administrative system throughout the regions under Roman domination. These 13 regional units were called dioceses; (see page 25). Each diocese was to be headed by a vicar. These dioceses were grouped into four prefectures, each under a prefect. While this entire system brought political stability to Rome, it also created divisions within the Empire, which eventually became institutionalized.

Diocletian also reorganized the military. He divided the army’s administration, creating provincial commands in the hands of generals called duces. (This word later developed into the aristocratic title of duke.)

Diocletian also worked hard to stabilize prices and encourage trade. All these changes were sweeping and designed to stabilize the destructive trends which had developed in the Empire for over a century. In creating a co-ruler, an additional capital was also created in the Empire. Diocletian established himself in the eastern half of the Empire at a city called Nicomedia, located along the Sea of Marmora.

Despite his best efforts, after Diocletian’s retirement in A.D. 305, many of his reforms fell apart, followed by civil war. For several years, five men contended for the throne. One of them, known as Constantine (A.D. 306–337), ultimately came to the front, becoming the sole ruler of the Empire in 324.

During his reign, Constantine moved the eastern capital to the ancient Greek city of Byzantium, located at the entrance to the Black Sea. He called his capital New Rome or Constantinople. (Today it is Istanbul, Turkey.)

This new eastern capital signaled a permanent split between the two halves of the Empire. During his reign, Constantine maintained rule through himself and a joint ruler in the west. But a later ruler, Theodosius (A.D. 379–395) officially divided the Empire into two halves between his two sons upon his death. After this, the 400-year-old Roman Empire was never governed as a single state again.

Review and Write

Although Diocletian’s divisions of the Empire were meant to provide stability, they ultimately caused the Empire to split forever in two. How?
Decline of the Roman Empire

After the death of Emperor Marcus Aurelius in A.D. 180, his son, Commodus, followed as ruler. He was completely different from his father. Commodus was unskilled at leadership and was a cruel dictator. He enjoyed the blood sports of the day so much that he participated in them as a gladiator. His 12-year rule came to an end when he was strangled by his own athletic trainer as part of a conspiracy.

Civil war broke out within Rome following the death of Commodus. Various army officers fought to bring their own candidate to the throne. After much murder and mayhem, Septimius Severus (A.D. 193–211) was made emperor of Rome.

Under Severus, the principate established by Augustus came to an official end. Augustus had always wanted the Senate to hold some element of power. However, the Senate’s role as an authority had gradually been reduced by Rome’s emperors until it was finally reduced to nearly nothing under Severus. Severus made it clear that he did not recognize the Senate’s power and that he received his authority from the military. By the 3rd century A.D., the title of princeps—first among equals—was dead, and the emperor had become known as dominus, or lord. With this change, the emperor of the Roman Empire was an absolute ruler.

But the real holder of the power in Rome was the military and its generals. Not only did generals frequently become emperors, but other high offices within the Empire—governors; administrators, tax officials—were also filled by army officers. Emperor Severus recognized his dependency, even on his deathbed, where he is reported to have said to his son: “Make the soldiers rich and don’t trouble about the rest.”

The dynasty established by Septimius Severus continued through A.D. 235. For the next half-century, Rome was ruled by a long series of emperors who were army leaders. These were dark years for the Empire. Among the next 26 emperors—often called the barracks emperors since most came from the ranks of the military—only one died of natural causes. Many only served for a few years or even months before they were killed by a usurper—another officer wanting his time on the throne. This period was a difficult one for the people of the Empire. Foreign invaders were beginning to nibble at the fringes of Rome, harassing border patrols and garrisons. There were nearly constant civil wars between generals.

The central government was always on the brink of collapse. No structure was in place to guarantee an appointed successor to Rome’s throne. The result was murder, chaos, and civil war, with unrestrained armies and their leaders fighting for control.

Life in the countryside was chaotic and tenuous. Rampaging armies of Rome fought one another and often took from the farms, villas, and country estates what they needed to survive.

All this led to economic decline within the Empire. Towns began to isolate themselves, trading with only local merchants and agrarians, too afraid to market their produce and goods in the next city where they might be robbed and killed by roving bands of soldiers on the roads of Rome.

This decline in trade caused shortages, inflation, and a near economic collapse of the Roman Empire. It also caused money to have less value. The Empire began debasing its coins, meaning less silver and gold went into them.

By the mid-200s, the once great Roman Empire was a scattered framework of cities, each pursuing their own economic, social, and political goals. And the decline was moving faster in the western half of the Empire.

This caused emperors to give support to the eastern Empire in a desperate attempt to save half, rather than lose the whole of the Roman state.

Review and Write

1. On a separate sheet, make a list of some of the problems experienced in the Roman Empire during the 3rd century A.D. Which one do you consider the most serious?

2. What do you think was the most significant factor leading to the decline of the Roman Empire by the mid-200s? Why?