

History Training: Rise and Fall of Roman Empire -509 B.C.-476 A.D. Spring 2010

I. General Overview

- Founding of Rome- amalgam of Etruscan, Greek and Italic influences throughout the Monarchy (753-509 B.C.E.)
- Tyrannical kings led to reform which led to establishment of the Republic of Rome (509 B.C.E.) res= thing publica= of the people
- Senate and Assembly shared leadership of the republic
- Long war with Carthage brings expansion, goods, money and problems
- Rapid expansion of Roman territory and strong army to maintain it
- Ferocity of battle and “generosity” in defeat
- Stress on Roman society leads to social unrest, attempts at reform and civil wars
- Triumphs of Julius Caesar expand empire but his desire for absolute power leads to his assassination
- Nephew (Octavian) given title (Augustus) by the Senate with powers that established him as Emperor and started Empire period (27 B.C.E)
- Little growth of the empire during this time but a great deal of \$ and loss of life in constant battles to maintain it
- Introduction of Christianity comes into conflict with the Roman Empire
- Emperor Constantine (307 A.D.) grants toleration of religion within the Empire and enables the Christian church to grow
- Outlying groups of displaced people invade from the North and East
- Rome is unable to maintain her borders and the empire is divided into 2: Western Roman Empire and Eastern Roman Empire (395 A.D.)
- Western Roman Empire ultimately falls to Germanic invaders. (476 A.D)
- Eastern Roman Empire continues as the Byzantine Empire until 1453

II. Theme: Trade and Commerce in Roman Society

Trade and Commerce in Roman Society

- Prior to 300 BC, barter was main way to buy goods – then lumps of copper and bronze came into use, and by 200 BC coins were used
- Most stores run by families of slaves on behalf of their owners, or by freedmen. The storekeepers often lived above their shops. Most stores sold food – bakers, butchers, grocery stores, rotisseries, etc.
- Many shops also acted as studios/workshops for goldsmiths, perfume makers, shoemakers, weavers, marble-workers, and carpenters. There were trade guilds.
- The Forum was the center of trade in the city, as well as a meeting place and political arena.

Acquisition of Territory

Punic Wars (264-202 B.C.E.): Carthage held the power in the Mediterranean by dominating trade. Rome was concerned that Carthage would gain control of the Straits of Messina.

- Results: Rome won income
- Rome gained her first province – a first step in creating a Roman empire
- Rome learned how to make war at sea
- Carthage gave up entire empire – only retained the city itself
- Rome acquired Carthage's empire: Spain, the islands, North Africa. In 50 years Rome had acquired most of the western Mediterranean
- Every conquered province brought more money, goods and slaves to Rome (this created issues with the poor Romans- no jobs!)
- Conquered lands needed large armies to secure them; army keystone of empire

III. Theme: Government and Law

Structure of Government

- Once the kings were banished, Senate took control of the government
- Senate agreed to share the leadership with the Assembly (made up of citizens (land owning men) who ruled for the people)
- Senate controlled the treasury, investigated crimes against the state, made foreign policy
- Initially, the Assembly, elected 2 men yearly to office of Consul for one year: acted as judges, priests, military commanders, councilors
- As Rome became larger and more complex, more layers of bureaucracy were needed: magistrates, praetors, censors, questors, etc
- Magistrates became lifelong members of the Senate
- Assembly was supreme authority, but they usually followed the wishes of the Senate

Law

- Law allowed absorbed territories to maintain independence, enjoy privileges of Roman technology, protection and self government as long as they didn't revolt and provided manpower for wars and tributes
- 12 Tables: First written laws (450 B.C.E) to ease tensions between the upper (patricians: landowners and rulers) and the lower classes (plebians: workers). Fashioned after the Greek Solon's laws, these, too offered some protection for the lower classes, covering all sorts of crimes and conditions. (Also to ease the tension. Tribunes were also created: Plebians had their own assembly and magistrates)

By 146 BC, Rome had been at war for nearly 100 years. It had taken its toll – the city ruled a large empire with a government that was designed to rule a city-state. The strains of rising social tensions, vulnerability to powerful military commanders and the practical requirements of governing such a large area would prove too great for the Republic. It took another 100 years for the Republic to fall apart.

The Empire Period

- After years of unrest, Octavian named Augustus Caesar in 27 B.C.
- Senate grants him “greater proconsular” powers and the power of the tribune
- Becomes the Emperor (although he never referred to himself, as such) and the decision making power of the Senate, Assembly and Tribune was over
- Created Praetorian Guard which was the emperor’s own army to protect him
- Augustus Caesar stabilized Roman Empire with his long rule (41 years) and established a new political system.
- Named his own heir to succeed him: his stepson Tiberius
- Augustus Caesar was proclaimed a god after his death
- Later this form of government continues on until 1453

IV. World Philosophy and Religions

- Rome was polytheistic and absorbed into their culture many of the Greek gods and goddesses by renaming them
- Jesus Christ was born and raised in the Roman province of Palestine
- Unrest in Palestine and large crowds gathering around Jesus were viewed as threats to Roman authority
- After his death, his followers called themselves Christians and they believed there was only one god, refused to recognize that the Roman Emperor became a deity when he died
- Persecution of Christians reached its’ fullest extent around 250 A.D
- Emperor Constantine’s conversion to Christianity led to Edict of Milan in 313 A.D. : made any religion, including Christianity, permissible.
- In 392 A.D. Christianity became the official religion of the empire

V. The Tangible Legacy of Rome

- roads, aqueducts, arches and fortresses are still all over Europe. Many of these structures are still in use!
- Art and Architecture
- Written Work: Seneca, Plutarch, Ovid, Livy, Horace, Vergil, Galen, Pliny, etc

VI. The Intangible Legacy of Rome

- The Renaissance (our year 3) was a rediscovery and celebration of Roman arts and attitudes
- Many countries still use the bureaucracy of commerce that was set up during Roman times to efficiently run the large empire.
- Many countries, including our own have governments based upon the division of power between its’ two houses
- Our government’s buildings reflect the grandeur and style of Roman architecture.
- Our notion of civic duty: voting, serving on juries and volunteering for the good of our city, state or government we practice the Roman ideals of being a citizen.

The American magazine National Geographic described the legacy of the Roman Empire in *The World According to Rome*:

“The enduring Roman influence is reflected pervasively in contemporary language, literature, legal codes, government, architecture, engineering, medicine, sports, arts, etc. Much of it is so deeply imbedded that we barely notice our debt to ancient Rome. Consider language, for example. Fewer and fewer people today claim to know Latin — and yet, go back to the first sentence in this paragraph. If we removed all the words drawn directly from Latin, that sentence would read: “The.”