

The Roman Empire

Contents

Section 1: Introduction	p. 2
Section 2: Using the Resources	p. 4
Section 3: Activities	p. 5
Section 4: Plans of Action	p. 11
Section 5: Further Reading	p. 13

Section 1: One Unit, Two Resources

This Premium TimeMaps Unit is based on a **sequence of maps** showing the rise and fall of the Roman Empire, between 500 BCE and 500 CE.

This sequence is presented in **two resources**, a slide show and a series of map pages, so that teachers can choose **two approaches** to covering the topic with your students: a whole-class presentation; and individual project work, for which the institution will need a multiuser licence so that the students can access the resources for themselves.

1. Slide show

The slide show is primarily designed for use as a whole-class presentation. Commentary notes are available as an *aide memoir* for the teacher when delivering the presentation. They provide talking points on each map in the slide show.

The slide show can also be used by the students in their project work. A students' commentary is also provided.

2. Timemaps map pages

These are designed specifically for use by students in their project work.

Each map shows the Roman Empire at a particular date. The maps are accompanied by information about what is happening at that date.

This combination of map and information makes it easy for students to use the map pages, though not so ideal for teachers to use as a class presentation (hence the slideshow, see above).

Aims

This Premium TimeMaps unit consists of a sequence of maps which follows the rise and fall of the Roman Empire through a thousand years of history, from 500 BCE though 500 CE.

The unit aims to give a panoramic overview of one of the most iconic topics in western history. Apart from the key events, it looks at the way Rome's politics, society and culture responded to changing circumstances.

Students should finish using this unit with a rounded overview of the history of the Roman Empire. For example, they should know that

- Rome originated as a city-state in central Italy, and that by the end of the Sixth Century BCE had become a republic;
- By the early Third Century BCE, through conquest and diplomacy, it had become the leader of a confederation of city-states which spanned almost the whole of Italy;
- It fought a long series of wars with its great rival, Carthage, and then went on to conquer other regions of the Mediterranean world;
- These conquests brought about great changes within Roman society, which eventually destroyed the Roman Republic;
- A succession of Roman emperors then brought two centuries of stability and peace to the Roman world;

- From the late second century CE, the Roman Empire went a long decline which eventually saw the complete loss of all its western provinces.

Section 2: Using the Resources

The unit can be used in one of two ways:

1. Whole-class presentation

The **slide show** is specifically designed for teachers to use as a whole class presentation, offering a visual, panoramic overview of the topic. It can be used as an introduction to the topic, or as a wrap up, or as a stand-alone resource.

A commentary is provided to help teachers cover the key points for each slide.

In Section 3 Task 2 (below), are a series of questions (they are also found at the end of the commentary), which can be answered by a single word or short phrase. The questions aim to reinforce the learning outcomes from the presentation, and can be used as a test or reinforcement exercise at the end of the presentation.

Another way might be to print the questions out and give them to the students, and ask the students to note down the answers as the slide show progresses. They can either submit their answers for marking, or collaborate in small groups to come up with an agreed set of answers.

2. Student-based enquiry work

Students use the maps, plus linked information, to find out for themselves about the topic. In the process, they gain knowledge and understanding of the topic, whilst at the same time developing analytical and other thinking skills.

Students can use either **map pages** or **slide show**. In the map pages, the linked information is right next to the maps; in the slide show, it is in the student commentary.

In either case the institution will need a multiuser licence.

Both slide show and map pages are built around the same series of maps, following the rise and fall of the Roman Empire between 500 BCE and 500 CE.

Simple forward/back navigation buttons (and in the map pages, a timeline below the maps) make it easy to move through the map sequence.

To start the sequence of map pages, click on the map dated 500 BCE.

To start the slide show, click HERE.

Teachers may wish to combine the whole-class presentation approach with the student-based approach - for examples, see Section 4.

Section 3: Activities

In this section are some suggestions to using this Premium Unit actively in the classroom.

Students can do the activities as individuals or in small groups. They will obviously need to have direct access to this Premium TimeMap unit, for which a multi-user licence is required.

Task 1. Preparatory work - Geographical Background

Hopefully, by the time they come to study the Roman Empire students will have already looked at the Ancient Greeks. The two civilisations' histories are so inextricably bound together that the one cannot really be understood without the other.

The following Timemaps Premium unit is an ideal tool to do this:

- **Greece and Persia** looks at Greek civilisation in its classical age, and its interplay with the Persian Empire to its east. This sets the context for the rise of the Roman Empire.

Task 2. Questions

These questions can be used with the slide show (see above; hence they also appear at the end of the [slide show commentary](#)). They can also be used in the context of student-based enquiry work, as a simple way to reinforce knowledge of the topic. If so, in place of whole class presentation, students access the slide show or map pages directly to answer the questions.

The answers are given (*in Italics*).

1. Who were the people of central/northern Italy against whom the Romans rebelled to form their Republic? (*The Etruscans*)
2. What central Italian people did the Romans belong to, whose language they spoke? (*The Latins*)
3. What were the two chief magistrates of the Roman republic called? (*Consuls*)
4. To which class of Roman society did the most important families in the early Republic belong? (*The Patricians*)
5. To which people did the raiders belong who nearly destroyed Rome in around 390 BCE? (*Gauls, or Celts*)
6. What was the name of the king who came over to Italy to defend the Greek cities of southern Italy against the Romans? (*Pyrrhus*)
7. What was the name of the great trading city in North Africa against whom the Romans fought three wars? (*Carthage*)
8. Who was the brilliant general who almost destroyed the Romans in the Second Punic War? (*Hannibal*)
9. The First Triumvirate was made up of Pompey, Crassus and - who? (*Julius Caesar*)
10. Which (at the time) semi-mythical island did this general invade in 55 and 54 BCE? (*Britain*)

11. What was the name of this general's adopted son and heir? (*Octavian, or Augustus, as he came to be known as*)
12. What religion began to spread around the Roman empire in the 1st century CE? (*Christianity*)
13. Name one of the five able emperors who ruled the empire in the 2nd century CE (*Trajan, Hadrian, or Marcus Aurelius - there were also Nerva and Antoninus Pius, but these are not mentioned here*).
14. Which emperor became a Christian and established Christianity as the dominant religion of the Roman empire? (*Constantine*)
15. What was the name of the new capital of the Eastern Roman empire which this emperor established? (*Constantinople*)
16. What German tribe sacked Rome in 410 CE (*the Visigoths - just Goths will do*)
17. What was the name of the king under whom the Huns reached the height of their power in the mid-5th century CE? (*Attila*)
18. What German people(s) settled in Britain in the 5th century CE? (*The Anglo-Saxons, or Angles and Saxons*)
19. What German tribe settled in North Africa and sacked Rome for a second time in 455 CE? (*The Vandals*)
20. Name one of the languages that Latin was evolving into at this time. (*French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Catalanian or Provençal*)

Task 3. Multiple choice questions

This is a shorter alternative to Task 2.

1. The Twelve Tables were A. a large feast in the Roman forum, B. the earliest written Roman law code, C. mathematical tables for Roman engineers to use when constructing roads, or D. tablets on which the legends of the foundation of Rome were written?
2. At the Battle of Cannae the Romans were heavily defeated by A. the Gauls, B. the Etruscans, C. the Greeks, or D. the Carthaginians?
3. The Gracchi brothers were noted for A. founding Rome, B. winning great battles against the Gauls, C. proposing reforms to help the poor, D. expelling the last king of Rome?
4. The statesman most responsible for establishing the empire was A. Julius Caesar, B. Mark Antony, C. Octavian, or D. Pompey?
5. The emperor Constantine is famous for A. persecuting the Christians, B. founding the city of Constantinople, C. Being killed in battle against the Goths or D. being the last of the Roman emperors in the west?

Task 4. Critical thinking questions

The aim of these activities is to develop analytical thinking skills, and in particular getting students to grapple with history-specific issues such as cause and consequence, and change and continuity.

General Instructions:

1. Students read the questions below, which either they or their teacher has chosen.
2. They then go through the map sequence or slideshow (in the latter case they will have to have access to a copy of the student commentary).
3. As they do this, they carefully take notes, focusing on the questions they are answering. They should bear in mind when and where events or developments happen; why they happen; and what changes as a result of them happening.
4. Students use their notes to prepare their answers. These can be in either essay form or as presentations.

(Note to teacher: suggested answers are given in italics and brackets)

Short questions:

1. What changes did Greek influence bring to Italy between the 8th and 5th centuries BCE? *(city-states, literacy, republican form of government)*
2. Early Roman society was divided into two main groups. Name these, and explain how they were different from one another. *(The Patricians, the ruling group of wealthy Roman families, and the Plebeians, the common people)*
3. What were the causes the Conflict of the Orders, and why did it subside? *(The Plebeians objected to the power of the Patricians. It subsided when they gained equal rights with them. Also, leading Plebeians became members of the ruling class in Rome, and so were able to bring the two sides together)*
4. What were the Twelve Tables, and why were they important? *(They were first time Roman laws were written down, and thus formed the foundation of Roman Law, which in turn forms the basis of the legal systems of many countries today)*
5. Why did Rome and Carthage come into conflict with one another? *(Carthage became alarmed at the rise of Roman power)*
6. Why did Rome's expansion in the Second Century BCE lead to the rich becoming richer and the poor becoming poorer? *(The influx of slaves into Italy led the rich to create slave-run estates, which squeezed many poorer Roman farmers off the land and into the growing slums of Rome)*
7. What changes in the Roman army led to it becoming a threat to the Republic in the First Century BCE? *(The rise of long-service armies recruited from the landless poor, who looked to their commanders to secure them land when they were discharged, created military power-bases for ambitious generals)*
8. The sack of Rome by the Goths in 410 CE did not inflict much damage - so why was it so significant? *(It was a traumatic event because the city was still seen as the center and heart of the Roman Empire)*

9. Much of Roman civilization was destroyed in the west. What survived? - and Why? (*Roman law, as continued to be applied to the old population by Roman officials working for German kings; and much Roman and Greek learning was preserved by Christian monks*)

Extended exercises:

Answer one or more of the following questions. There are no right or wrong answers for them, but give reasons.

Question 1:

How did the early Roman Republic, originally ruling just a single city-state, come to conquer most of Italy?

Answers should include as many as the following as possible:

- *Its Alliance system, including its offering of Roman and Latin citizenship, its co-option of local elites into its ruling group;*
- *its establishing of Roman and Latin colonies throughout Italy;*
- *the building of roads, which allowed troops to be moved quickly to where they were needed;*
- *the military reforms - the legion, the century (and the centurion);*

Students might also give other reasons, but the above are the ones mentioned in the information.

Question 2:

Trace the key developments in the rise of the Roman Empire.

These could include:

- *The foundation of the Republic;*
- *the Sack of Rome by the Gauls;*
- *the creation of the Alliance system;*
- *the conquest of Italy and the reforms which accompanied;*
- *the Punic Wars which gave the Romans command of the western Mediterranean;*
- *the conquests of the eastern Mediterranean*
- *the political tensions and civil wars of the late Republic and the conquests which accompanied these,*
- *the resolution to the internal conflicts by Augustus, and the peace, prosperity and expansion which took place under the emperors.*

Question 3:

Why did the Republic give way to the Empire?

- *Answers should focus on the series of civil wars which ended the Republic, and the actions of such leading politician-generals as Caesar and Octavian. However, deeper causes should be explored, including:*
- *the growing inequalities of Roman society from the 2nd century BCE onwards, which led to the decline of the class of independent farmers, the emergence of a landless and rootless underclass in Rome, the rise of criminal gangs in the city, and the diminishing pool of farmer-soldiers for the army;*
- *the rise of armies of long-serving soldiers, loyal to their commanders;*
- *linked to this, the emergence of over-powerful proconsuls;*
- *violent factionalism of Roman politics in the later Republic, which prevented sensible policies from being adopted.*

Question 4:

So far as Roman government was concerned, what changed when the Republic became the empire - and what remained the same?

This is not an exhaustive list but...

The key changes were:

- *Many provinces, including all those on the frontier where most of the legions were now stationed, were governed by officials appointed by the emperor. This meant that he now held a virtual monopoly of military power in the empire.*
- *The senate, which had played the dominant role in governing the Republic, now had its authority greatly restricted by the vast amount of power now held by the emperor.*

Some key continuities were:

- *The senate and the traditional republican magistracies (consul, praetor, tribune of the plebs) remained, though their power and influence were considerably circumscribed.*
- *Many provinces continued to be governed by proconsuls appointed by the senate.*
- *The legions continued in being, though now stationed permanently along the frontiers of the empire.*
- *Roman law remained in force.*

Question 5:

Looking at the map and information for 180 CE, explain the success of the Roman empire.

Points to include:

- *Capable emperors*
- *Sound defenses*
- *Enduring internal peace and prosperity*
- *The spread of Roman citizenship amongst subject peoples*
- *The co-option of local elites into the Roman ruling class, up to the emperorship itself*

Question 6:

Describe the long term causes for the decline of the Roman Empire in the 3rd to 5th centuries.

These would be:

- *New, more aggressive enemies - Sasanian dynasty (Persian Empire); more effective German tribes; the Huns*
- *internal instability - emperors unable to establish control over armies.*

Additional marks should be given for discussions of the causes behind these.

Question 7:

In what ways was the Roman Empire in the fourth century CE different from the Roman Empire in the second century?

The answer should include as many as the following points as possible:

- *more than one emperor*
- *Christianity the dominant religion*
- *Rome no longer the capital*
- *Constantinople the new capital on the east*
- *new mobile field armies at the core of the empire's defense*
- *legions no longer enjoying the high status they had before*

- *the empire divided, not just into provinces, but into a hierarchy of administrative regions, with small provinces at the bottom, above them vicariates, and above them dioceses*
- *senators no longer held majority of important posts*
- *a huge bureaucracy*
- *weakened town councils*
- *towns smaller - more economic activity an economic shift to countryside*

Section 4: Plans of Action

Here in this section are possible strategies, plans of action you might like to follow (or adapt as you see fit) for using some of these activities.

Plan A:

This plan combines the presentation approach with the student-centered enquiry approach. Do this if you are doing this topic as a major topic with the class.

1. Complete Task 1: Geographical Background.
2. Introduce the topic by presenting the slide show to the class. Use the teacher's commentary as a guide.
3. The students complete Task 4 by answering one or more of the questions given there.

They use either the map pages or the slide show (plus student commentary) to answer the question(s).

They can do this task as individuals, for their own project work. Alternatively, they can do it in small groups.

All the students or groups can be asked to do the same questions, or all to do different ones.

4. The students then write up and submit their work in essay form for marking, or prepare a presentation for showing to the class.

Plan B:

This plan will take less time than Plan A to complete.

10. Complete Task 1: Geographical Background.
11. Show the slide show to the class, using the teachers' commentary as a guide. Tell the students that there will be a test at the end.
12. Ask the questions in Task 2 to the class as a whole, with the students calling out the answers (if they remember any!).
13. Give out the questions on printed sheets (for this, use the questions as given at the end of the students' commentary). Show the class the slide show again. This time they take notes in preparation for the same test again.
14. The students write their answers on this sheet and submit for marking.

Plan C:

This should take longer than Plan B to complete, but not as long as Plan A.

1. Preliminary work: Geographical Background.

2. The students are handed copies of the questions (use the questions as given at the end of the students' commentary).
3. The students then work their way through the map pages or the slide show (if the latter, using the students' commentary), and as they do so they note down the answers to the questions.
4. The teacher then shows the slide show to the class as a whole, using the teachers commentary as a guide. In the course of this presentation they will give the students the answers to the questions.

Further reading

A list of all TimeMaps articles can be found on the Encyclopedia home page. Here is a selected list of the key articles which students should find most helpful for this topic:

[The Civilization of Ancient Rome](#)

[The Rise of the Roman Empire](#)

[The Early Roman Empire](#)

[The Late Roman Empire](#)

[The History of the Roman Empire](#)

[The Etruscans](#)

[Ancient Carthage](#)

[The History of Ancient Greece](#)

[Alexander the Great and the Hellenistic World](#)

[The Parthian Empire](#)

[The Sasanian Empire](#)

[History of Ancient Palestine](#)

[The Byzantine Empire](#)

[Medieval Europe](#)