

Premium TimeMaps Unit Slideshow

The Roman Empire

Student's Slideshow Commentary

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Introduction

This activity can be used as a stand-alone exercise, as an introduction to this topic in world history; or as a wrap up/reinforcement exercise.

The slideshow can also be used by students in their project work. For this they will need to access the resource themselves, as well as the student commentary (or a printout of it). This will require a multi-user licence.

For each slide, the commentary mostly follows the same formula:

1. Slide number and date

2. Introductory paragraph (in bold)

This seeks to encapsulate in a sentence or two what's going on in the map. These are in bold.

3. Bullet points

One or more bullet points, giving very brief points of interest in the map, or in the period it covers.

4. Additional notes

These give more in-depth support to the bullet points. Much of the information these contain may be superfluous to your needs, especially if you are covering the topic quickly. However, we have included it so that it is there for you if you want it. We suggest that, prior to using the Presentation with your class, you go through these additional notes and highlight any you wish to use.

Sometimes there are notes in italics - these are simply hints and tips for teachers. They don't occur very often.

The commentary notes are followed by a short series of questions.

A suggestion:

To keep your students more engaged (and, by the way, if your students are not engaged or benefitting from these maps, then let us know and we'll refund your money), why not start each new map with a question, such as, "How is this map different from the previous one?"

Commentary

When using the Sideshow in class it might be helpful to print these notes out.

Slide 1: 500 BCE

By this date Rome is an independent city state in central Italy.

- The city traces its origins back to about 800 BCE, when a group of villages began to be built on the banks of the River Tiber, in central Italy (note 1).
- By about 600 BCE, these had merged to form the city of Rome (note 2).
- By this date Rome was governed as a republic (note 3).

Additional notes

1. Italy: 800 BCE to 500 BCE

Italy had experienced great changes in the past few centuries. In 800 BCE the Iron-Age tribes here had lived simple lives as farmers and herdsman. They dwelt in small villages and were tough warriors.

Greek influences

Shortly after 800 BCE Greeks started settling along the coasts of Italy and Sicily (the island to the south of Italy). They brought with them their civilization, which was more advanced than that of the peoples of Italy. This included a city-based way of life, literacy, and beautiful art and architecture.

It was not long before neighboring tribes began adopting a Greek-style way of life. Groups of small villages merged to form city-states (consisting of a walled town, with its temples and market places, plus some surrounding territory) in many parts of Italy. Literacy spread, as did the techniques of Greek art and architecture. However, they adapted these elements to their own tastes, so that different local cultures began to emerge.

The Etruscans

The most famous of these Italian cultures was the Etruscan civilization. This people lived in a group of cities in central-northern Italy. They had adapted the Greek alphabet for their own language, built fine temples and produced beautiful works of art.

In 500 BCE the Etruscans were at the height of their power. Their cities formed a league, which had expanded its power over much of northern Italy. Until recently they had also dominated communities to their south. One of these was the small city of **Rome**. By this date, however, Rome had regained its independence from the Etruscans.

2. Rome in 500 BCE

The Latins were another people living in central Italy, just to the south of the Etruscans. By 500 BCE they had taken to living in city-states, and adapted the Etruscan alphabet to their own use (the modern English writing system is based on the Latin alphabet).

The small Latin city of Rome was located on the border between Latium (the Latins' homeland) and Etruria (the land of the Etruscans). It also lay between the coast and the warlike hill tribes of the interior - peoples who had not abandoned their traditional way of life.

Rome therefore had a mixed population, made up of Latins, Etruscans, Sabines (the hill tribe nearest to Rome), and probably some Greek merchants and craft workers.

3. The Roman Republic

The Greeks had also introduced a new kind of government to Italy.

Most of the Greek city-states had long since got rid of kings and were governed as republics. Now the Italian city-states were doing the same.

In republics, instead of hereditary rulers, citizens (i.e. the free adult males of the city) formed an assembly which elected officials to govern them. These were advised by a council made up of men from the wealthiest and most-respected families.

In Rome, a series of Etruscan kings had ruled until recently. They had turned Rome from a collection of villages into a city-state, complete with temples, forums, city walls, an excellent drainage and sewage system.

Recently, however, they had begun to rule in a tyrannical and even cruel way (that is, according to the stories Romans later told themselves). They had therefore been expelled (the traditional date for this event was 509 BCE).

The monarchy was then replaced by a republic. In place of the kings, the Romans now elected two annual officials called consuls (at least they were by the time regular records had started to be compiled; this may not have been the situation in the early years of the Republic). These officials were advised by a council called the Senate, made up of the leading men in Rome.

Slide 2: 338 BCE

By 338 BCE the Romans have come through great challenges to dominate central Italy.

- Hostile neighbors constantly attacked Rome, and in about 390 BCE a group of Gauls sacked the city (note 1).
- Within Rome itself, social and political tensions led to severe class conflict, but in due course these led to the rise of a stable system of government (note 2).
- The Romans were also able to defeat their neighbors to gain firm control of central Italy (note 3).

Additional notes

1. The Sack of Rome

The city-states and tribal communities of Italy were tiny by modern standards - just a few miles across. Nevertheless, they were fiercely independent, and constantly at war with one another. Almost every year the Romans had to fight off attacks from neighboring city-states and hill tribes.

A century of hard fighting saw the Romans gain the upper hand over their enemies. Then, in about 390 BCE, a band of Gauls (whose homeland lay far to the north, in what is now modern France), raided deep down into Italy. They got as far as Rome, and sacked the city. The Romans paid them a huge amount of gold to get them to leave.

The Romans never forgot this humiliating event, which had almost resulted in the destruction of the city and its people.

Rome's neighbors took advantage of this situation to attack her. It was only with the greatest difficulty that the Romans were able to defeat them.

2. The Conflict of the Orders

In the early Republic, all public officials and senators were members of a small group of wealthy, high-status families called the Patricians. The rest of the Roman people (the Plebeians) soon came to resent this control. Some Plebeians, who had grown rich through trade and owning land, felt especially frustrated about being excluded from these powerful positions.

A long period of tension followed, which modern scholars call the Conflict of the Orders (due to the conflict between the Patrician Order and the Plebeian Order). It led to much turmoil within Rome during the early days of the Republic. At times this threatened to tear Rome apart.

To resolve these class struggles, the Romans modified their system of government to protect the rights of all citizens.

The beginnings of Roman Law

Another thing to emerge from the Conflict of the Orders was the famous Roman legal system.

The Plebeians protested against arbitrary decisions by Patrician officials, and demanded that the laws be written down so that everyone could know what they were.

According to Roman tradition, this led to the laws being inscribed on twelve bronze tablets in the 450s. These Twelve Tables, as they were called, were on public display in the main square (forum) in Rome.

In its early form it was frighteningly harsh by modern standards. It was also highly patriarchal - early Roman laws emphasised the power of life and death a father had over his family.

However, it gave all Roman citizens basic legal rights before the law; for example, no one could be punished for a crime without a trial.

Over the centuries Roman law became more and more complex as new laws were added. It also became less harsh.

Today, Roman law underpins the legal systems of many countries throughout the world.

The Plebeian Assembly and Tribunes

The Plebeians came to have their own assembly. This was under the leadership of their own elected officials, called tribunes of the people.

These had the power to veto laws made by officials which went against the interests of the common people.

Power-sharing

Increasingly, members of the Plebeian order were allowed to be elected to public office. This was all the more the case as Rome's expansion called for a growing number of officials to be elected (each for one year): army commanders, judges, administrators.

The most important of these officials were the consuls, two of whom were elected each year so that neither could become too powerful. In time, Plebeians were allowed to fill even these posts.

Second, the senate continued to advise the magistrates. Most of its members were ex-officials themselves, so that their advice was backed up by long experience of public affairs.

This also meant that, as a growing number of officials were Plebeians, the senate became increasingly drawn from the Plebeian class. Soon, Patrician and Plebeian families were inter-marrying with each other, and a single aristocracy, the Senatorial order, began to emerge.

3. Control of central Italy

By 338 BCE, after hard fighting, the Romans had gained firm control of central Italy.

The victorious Romans did not take revenge on their defeated enemies by demanding heavy tribute, or even selling them into slavery, as was normal in the Ancient World.

Instead, they made treaties with them, which had benefits for the Romans but also for the new allies.

The Roman Alliance

The Romans offered each of the defeated city-states an alliance, on the basis of having “the same friends and enemies as Rome”.

These new allies had to provide troops to help in any wars the alliance fought, but otherwise they were able to govern themselves and follow their own laws and customs.

- Some of the smaller Latin city-states near Rome, were absorbed wholesale into the Roman state. Their leading families became members of the Roman senate.
- Larger Latin city-states were offered “half-citizenship”. In this, they were given the same legal rights as Roman citizens, except that they were not allowed to vote in the citizens’ assemblies in Rome. The cities’ leading families were, over time, given full Roman citizenship.
- Other cities which were not Latins were treated just as allies, but were offered respect, protection and friendship.

Colonies

The Romans also established colonies of their own citizens, and also of “half-citizens”, amongst their new allies. This helped to make sure that any rebellions could be put down as quickly as possible.

Roman roads

Another element in establishing Roman control over other cities was the construction of a network of well-built roads. These allowed Roman troops to move fast to meet any threat from peoples hostile to Rome’s growing power, or to put down outbreaks of rebellion amongst her allies.

As we shall see in the next notes, this alliance system, plus the planting of colonies and construction of roads, laid the foundations for Rome’s dominance in Italy.

Slide 3: 270 BCE

After much hard fighting, the Romans have conquered all of Italy except the far north.

- They have achieved this just as much by wise diplomacy (note 1)....
- ... as through military success (note 2).
- This expansion has brought the Romans into close contact with the Greek world, whose influence they now begin to feel much more directly than before (note 3).

Additional notes

1. Alliance building

As noted above (see note 3 above, 338 BCE), after the defeat of their enemies in central Italy the Romans created a system of alliances. In this, the Romans left their Allies to run their own affairs free from interference, only requiring from them troops to aid them in their wars.

One result of this alliance system was that the Romans and their Allies were obliged to come to the aid of any one of them which was attacked by an enemy (Rome's allies were not allowed to attack each other).

The Alliance were therefore constantly having to get involved in local wars on its borders. Some of these developed into long, hard struggles. The outcome was always the same, however - Rome and her Allies were victorious.

The defeated city-states and tribes were then also incorporated into the Alliance. The Romans were thus able to call on an ever-increasing pool of manpower for their wars.

Some modern scholars call this alliance system the Roman Confederation. By 270 BCE it had expanded to span almost all Italy.

2. Military success

This success had not been easy to achieve. The Romans were up against some of the toughest warrior peoples in the Ancient World, for example the Samnites. This people lived in the Apennines, that mountain chain running down the center of the Italian peninsula. From time to time, Roman armies were heavily defeated.

In the end, however, they were successful. This success was not only down to the greater manpower they were able to call on (see note 1). It was also due to changes in the way the Romans organized their armies. These changes made them the most effective military forces in the Mediterranean world at that time.

The Legions

The most important of these changes was the development of the famous Roman legions.

Legions consisted of about 5000 soldiers. However, unlike Greek formations, they were not just one large mass of men. They were divided into units of 100 men each, called centuries. Each was under the command of a centurion, an experienced soldier who could be relied upon to make sound decisions on their own responsibility.

This system made legions much more flexible than their enemies' forces, and easier to control. Centuries could fight independently of one another, or as parts of small task forces, as well as simply forming a small part of a whole legion.

3. The Greek World

A quick look at the map will show that the lands of the eastern Mediterranean have turned a different colour. This is because the lands once covered by the Persia Empire (plus some of India) were conquered (between 334 and 325 BCE) by a brilliant general, Alexander the Great. After his early death his kingdom came to be divided into several large and powerful kingdoms.

Alexander's conquests vastly expanded Greek civilization eastwards. Greek language and culture spread through all the new kingdoms which were established here. Elements of the ancient cultures of the region were absorbed into Greek civilization to form a new hybrid, which modern scholars call the Hellenistic world.

It was this world which the Romans would encounter in a century or so after this date.

The Greeks in Italy

In southern Italy, a number of Greek city-states had long been established (see above, 500 BCE). In 280 BCE, with Roman power now reaching down the Italian peninsula towards them, some Greek states invited Pyrrhus, king of Epirus, a famous Greek commander of that time, to come over to Italy with his army and protect them.

Pyrrhus did so, and won several battles against the Romans. These victories were gained at such cost to his own troops, however, that in 275 BCE he left Italy. From these events we get the term "Pyrrhic victory" - a victory not worth the cost of achieving it.

Greek influence on the Romans

Within just a few years all the Greek cities of southern Italy had fallen under Roman dominion. This brought the Romans into much closer contact with Greek civilization. Wealthier Romans began to acquire a taste for Greek art, architecture and literature. This was much to the disgust of conservative Romans, who regarded such influences as alien and "softening".

Slide 4: 220 BCE

The Romans have now fought and won their first war outside Italy, against the great sea power of Carthage.

- In order to achieve victory in the First Punic War (264-241 BCE), the Romans had to build a fleet and become a sea power (note 1).
- As a result of the war, the Romans gained their first overseas territories (note 2).

Additional notes

1. The First Punic War

The year 264 BCE saw the start of series of long wars between Rome and the city of Carthage.

Carthage was a wealthy trading city located on the Mediterranean coast of North Africa. She used her wealth to pay for a large mercenary army, but it was as a sea power that she was famous. Her navy dominated the western Mediterranean.

Alarmed by the rise of Roman power in Italy, the Carthaginians sent armies to the island of Sicily to shore up their influence there. Some Greek cities in Sicily appealed to Rome for help, and the Romans sent an army there. The First Punic War began soon after.

The Romans called them the Punic Wars because Carthage had originally been founded by Phoenician colonists (and the Latin for “Phoenician” is *Punicus*).

Rome becomes a sea power

To defeat one of the leading naval powers of the Ancient World, the Romans had to build a powerful navy from scratch. After nearly twenty years of hard fighting, and some dreadful losses (including some whole Roman fleets sunk by storms), the Romans were able to gain control of the seas around Italy and Sicily. In 241 the war came to an end in a Roman victory.

In the peace treaty that followed, the Carthaginians agreed that they would not rebuild their navy.

The Carthaginians did not take their defeat lying down, however. In the 20 years following the end of the war, they have carefully built up their power-base in Spain. The stage is set for the next round in the struggle between Rome and Carthage.

2. The first Roman provinces

Up to the First Punic War, Rome's power was confined to Italy, and she was able to exert her authority through the Alliance system she had built up. Now that she had territory overseas, the Romans set up their first province.

This was governed by a senior Roman official who combined the roles of civil administrator and military commander. As in Italy, the city-states in Sicily were left to run their own internal affairs. Unlike in Italy, however, these states were treated as subjects, not allies. They had to pay an annual tribute to Rome.

In the years after the end of the war, the Romans also occupied the islands of Corsica and Sardinia, and turned these into provinces as well.

Slide 5: 200 BCE

Between 218 BCE and 202 BCE, the Romans were up against one of the greatest generals in world history, Hannibal.

Additional note

Hannibal crosses the Alps

In 218 BCE the Carthaginian general in charge in Spain was a young man called Hannibal. His father, brother and (since 221) he himself had spent the previous 20 years building up Carthaginian power there.

In 218, Hannibal led a large army, mostly made up of Spanish and North African tribesmen, out of Spain, into southern Gaul, and from there across the Alps and down into northern Italy.

This took the Romans completely by surprise. Hannibal's army was then joined by thousands of Gallic warriors in northern Italy, who saw the Romans as a growing threat to their independence.

The greatest Roman defeat

Hannibal then marched south into Roman territory. Over the next three years the Romans sent three large armies against him. Hannibal destroyed them all. The last of these victories was at Cannae (216 BCE), in southern Italy. The Romans came to regard this as the worst defeat they ever suffered in their history.

After Cannae, Hannibal demanded Rome's surrender - but the Roman Senate refused. Hannibal then encouraged Rome's Allies to join him. Only a few cities answered his call. The majority remained loyal to Rome.

For the next 10 years Hannibal marched his army up and down Italy, to little effect. He was unable to receive support from his home city, as the Roman navy controlled the seas in between Italy and North Africa. The one Carthaginian army that tried to repeat Hannibal's feat of crossing into Italy by way of the Alps, was annihilated before it reached those mountains.

Roman victory

During this time, the Romans carefully nursed their strength, and when they were ready, went over to the attack. Avoiding battles in Italy, Roman armies drove the Carthaginians out of Spain and Sicily. They then invaded the Carthaginian home territory in North Africa.

The Carthaginians quickly recalled Hannibal to lead the defence of their city, but the Romans won a great victory at the Battle of Zama, in 202 BCE. This ended the war.

Victory against Carthage has left Rome in control of territories in Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica and Spain. She possesses the beginnings of a true overseas empire.

Slide 6: 140 BCE

The decades following the Rome's victory in the Second Punic War saw no stop to the expansion of Roman power.

Although the Romans ended the War as the leading power in the western Mediterranean, her armies have had much to do to secure her power in the region. They have also begun their advance into the lands of the eastern Mediterranean.

Additional note

After the War, Roman forces were soon engaged in Spain, in defending her gains there against hostile tribes. Gradually, with much hard fighting, the Romans have expanded their power across much of the Iberian peninsula.

First steps in the East

At the same time, her forces have become heavily involved in Greece. A series of wars have ended in the Romans conquering the kingdom of Macedonia and the Greek city-states (we studied these in the unit on *Persia and Greece*).

These conquests have brought Rome into direct contact with the large Hellenistic kingdoms of the eastern Mediterranean (see above, Map dated 270 BCE, note 3).

The end of Carthage

Meanwhile, alarmed at Carthage's recovery, the Romans decided to deal with their great enemy once and for all. In the Third Punic War (149-146 BCE), they destroyed Carthage, killed many of its people and sold the rest into slavery. They have added Carthage's territory in North Africa to their growing empire.

Slide 7: 100 BCE

Roman expansion has continued, and a vast flow of wealth now flows from these conquests back to Rome and Italy.

In the late 2nd century BCE, Rome annexes western Asia Minor, conquers more of Spain, and occupies a strip of southern Gaul (France). For the Romans, however, problems are mounting at home.

Additional note

The expansion of Roman power has brought changes to Rome. The huge amounts of war booty and tribute that have flowed into Rome from her overseas conquests has made some Romans vastly rich. Military commanders, provincial governors, wealthy bankers and successful businessmen have made fortunes out of the wars.

Not all Romans have benefitted, however. The many wars have flooded the Italian slave markets with captives. Thousands of these have been put to work on the estates of wealthy Romans - and these estates have expanded at the expense of the poor independent farmers.

Many have had to sell up to their richer neighbors, and swell the numbers of landless poor in Rome, who lived in the overcrowded slums of the rapidly growing city.

Violent politics

The growth of a new large class of unemployed in Rome has led to a rise in crime, which in turn affected politics. Some politicians have turned to violence to achieve their ambitions.

The most famous incidents involve the murder of two tribunes, the brothers Tiberius (in 133 BCE) and Gaius Gracchus (in 123 BCE). These politicians had promised to take land from big landowners and give it to the poor. This of course infuriated the faction of wealthy landowners.

Problems with recruitment

Linked to this, another problem is also emerging. Up to now, the owners of small farms have formed the backbone of Rome's armies. This has been because the early Romans thought that those with some land would feel that they had a stake in Rome's fortunes. They would be more patriotic and fight harder as a result.

With this class now being squeezed by the rise of large slave-worked estates, by the late 100s BCE, Roman armies were running short of recruits. What made the issue worse was that Rome's wars were now being fought, not in Italy, but overseas. Farmer-soldiers were having to go on campaign for several years at a time. This made military service very difficult for them and their families, adding to their problems.

In 107 BCE, therefore, a consul named Marius opened army service to those without any land. From now on, Roman armies would increasingly be made up of professional, long-service soldiers.

This may have increased the military effectiveness of these armies. However, it had political consequences, which we will encounter in the next slide.

Slide 8: 60 BC BCE

Roman conquests have continued, but so has the deterioration in Rome's internal affairs.

- The relationship between Rome and its Italian Allies broke down in the 90s BCE, and led to a vicious war with them (note 1).
- This was followed by a violent power-struggle between two of Rome's leading generals, Marius and Sulla (note 2).
- Political corruption and violence has become common in Rome (note 3).
- Massive slave revolts and a dramatic increase in piracy in the Mediterranean Sea have shaken Roman power in the 70s and 60s BCE (note 4).

Additional notes

1. The war against the Allies

Allies against Rome

By the early first century BCE the relationship between Rome and its Italian Allies was breaking down. The leaders of Allied cities increasingly felt that their interests were being ignored by the leaders in Rome.

In 90 BCE, many of Rome's Italian allies rebelled, leading to a bitter war (90-82 BCE). This was only brought to an end when the Senate granted full Roman citizenship to all Italians.

This war is known to history as the Social War. This confusing name is due to the fact that the Latin word for "allies" was *socii* (from which we get such English words as "society" and "associates").

2. Marius versus Sulla

These years also saw the outbreak of the first civil wars between Roman troops. These came about when bitter political competition between two leading Roman politicians/generals, Gaius Marius and Cornelius Sulla, broke out into open warfare.

As we noted above, Roman armies were now made up of full-time career soldiers drawn from the landless classes. These looked to their commanders for land to be allocated to them after discharge. In desperation, they were prepared to use violence to achieve their aims.

Both Marius and Sulla were successful generals with many loyal but desperate soldiers at their back.

Eventually Sulla triumphed and had himself appointed dictator (82 BCE - he resigned the next year, though not before trying to eliminate his political enemies). Naturally one of the main things he did was to distribute land (from towns all over Italy) to his discharged troops.

Sulla set an example to a later generation of ambitious leaders as the first "strong man" in Roman history.

3. Disorder at home

During the first decades of the first century BCE the political climate in Rome continued to deteriorate. Widespread corruption and bitter factionalism increased. Leading politicians even allied themselves with (or, in the case of a man called Clodius, led) violent crime gangs.

The checks and balances had given the Roman government great strength in the past. Now, however, they stood in the way of effective solutions to Rome's problems. Tribunes used their power of veto to stop measures that would go against the interest of their own factions.

A few men tried to hold the tide back by proposing reforms. The best known of these was the famous orator, Marcus Tullius Cicero. Their efforts were in vain as other politicians blocked any attempts to bring about change. Violent factionalism meant that Roman politics was completely unable to find a constructive way forward.

4. Slave Revolts and Piracy

Slave revolts

The paralysis in Roman government made it almost impossible to meet dangerous threats. For example, southern Italy and Sicily were now covered by great estates worked by thousands and thousands of slaves. Unsurprisingly there were several major slave rebellions. The most famous of these was led by the gladiator Spartacus, which was put down only with great difficulty.

Piracy

A little later an alarming upswing in piracy across the eastern Mediterranean took place. For a long time the Roman senate did little about this (partly because wealthy Romans benefited from the cheap slaves that the pirates offloaded in Italian ports). Only a huge effort by Roman sea and land forces under the command of a leading general named Gnaeus Pompeius (Pompey the Great) was able to bring this under control.

Slide 9: 50 BCE

During the 50s BCE, the political climate in Rome has deteriorated still further; nevertheless, Rome's expansion overseas has continued.

- Corruption and factionalism have continued to increase in Roman politics (note 1).
- The rise of overmighty generals has continued, especially with Julius Caesar's dramatic conquests in Gaul (modern France) (note 2).

Additional notes

1. Deteriorating political climate

The political climate in Rome, which we looked at in note 3 of Slide 8, has continued to get worse. However, over-mighty generals such as Pompey the Great, and later Julius Caesar, pose an ever more dangerous threat to the Roman Republic. They increasingly view their troops almost as private armies, and are prepared to use them to achieve their own ambitions.

The First Triumvirate

In 60 BCE, three leading figures in Rome made a pact. Their aim was to sideline the senate as an effective institution and dominate the government of Rome. These figures were:

- **Pompey**, the leading general of the day. He had defeated the pirates and brought all the lands of the eastern Mediterranean (except Egypt) under Roman rule.
- **Crassus**, who although not a famous general was a leading politician and known as the wealthiest Roman of all.
- **Julius Caesar**, a military genius who had scored brilliant successes in Spain. He was ambitious for more power.

Modern scholars call this pact the First Triumvirate (a "triumvirate" is a group of three people).

Julius Caesar conquers Gaul

Julius Caesar spent the next ten years conquering the whole of Gaul, and even invading the semi-legendary island of Britain, in 55 and 54 BC. During these years he wrote about his campaigns in detail, sending his reports back to Rome. Here they were read widely, and made him very popular with the common people.

In 53 BCE Crassus was killed whilst leading a military expedition to conquer the Parthians (he was trying to outdo Caesar and Pompey as a general, but failed spectacularly).

This event dealt a fatal blow to the triumvirate. Many senators had become alarmed at Caesar's growing success, and asked Pompey to lead a powerful anti-Caesar faction.

Slide 10: 1 CE

In the 40s and 30s BCE, the Roman world was wracked by civil war after civil war, until Caesar's adopted son, Octavian, was able to establish himself as sole ruler of Rome.

- The 40s and 30s BCE saw civil war after civil war, almost without pause, as leading Romans struggled with each other for power (note1).
- Finally, one man, Octavian, was able to establish himself as the sole ruler of the Roman world. He concentrated all political power in his own hands and became the first of the long line of Roman emperors (note 2).

Additional notes

1. Civil war after civil war

Caesar against Pompey

In 49 BCE, knowing that his enemies in the Senate intended to bring about his downfall, Caesar crossed the river Rubicon, which marked the boundary between Italy and Gaul, and led his army on Rome.

Pompey and his allies fled to Greece, where Caesar followed them and defeated them at the Battle of Pharsalus (48 BCE). Pompey himself escaped to Egypt, but was killed there on the orders of the king.

Caesar then spent some years dealing with other enemies, and returned to Rome in 45 BCE. He made himself dictator for life. However, on the 15th March, 44 BCE (the famous Ides of March, according to the Roman calendar), he was assassinated by a group of senators.

The Second Triumvirate against Caesar's assassins

Two men emerged to avenge Caesar's death. These were Mark Antony (his full name was Marcus Antonius), and Caesar's adopted son and heir, Octavian (full name: Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus). A third, Lepidus, joined them to form the Second Triumvirate. This was another pact to control Roman government.

Antony and Octavian led an army to Greece, where Caesar's assassins had fled to. There they defeated them at the Battle of Philippi (42 BCE).

Mark Antony against Octavian

Octavian then returned to Rome, while Antony went to the eastern Mediterranean to deal with Rome's enemies there. Lepidus was soon sidelined by the other two.

Antony soon became the lover of Cleopatra, the queen of Egypt (as Caesar had done before him), and made Egypt his base. Because of this, Octavian was able to turn the Romans against Antony by accusing him of betraying his country.

Another civil war inevitably followed. Octavian led a fleet to attack Antony and Cleopatra's fleet in Greece, and there defeated them at the Battle of Actium (31 BCE). Antony and Cleopatra both escaped back to Egypt, where they committed suicide. Octavian followed them there and annexed Egypt to the Roman Empire.

He was now the sole master of the Roman world. He returned to Rome and set about bringing peace and order to it.

2. The first Roman Emperor

Octavian knew that the Roman people were deeply attached to their republican form of government. They had no wish to be ruled by a king or a dictator. He understood very clearly, however, that the old Republic, and particularly the senate, could no longer control the powerful generals that the empire now needed.

The Restorer of the Republic...or maybe not

Octavian therefore claimed to be the Restorer of the Republic. He was very careful to show respect to the senate and the traditional republican public offices, such as the consulate. However, he reorganized the structures of government so that he, not the senate, dominated government: He did this as follows:

- He got the senate to give him control over most of the legions (which were now moved to the frontiers). This meant that he had so much military power that no other general could challenge him.
- He made sure that the appointment of all the most important military commanders, provincial governors and key government officials was now in his hands.
- To emphasize his wide military power he took the title of Imperator, or "Supreme Commander". It is from this word that we get the English word "Emperor".
- He had the senate grant him wide powers as a tribune, so that he could veto any laws the senate made which he did not like.
- In 27 BCE he had the senate give him a new title, Augustus. This loosely translates as "Revered One". All his successors as emperor used the same title.

The changes that Octavian (or Augustus as he was now called) made were very important in Roman history. In fact modern scholars divide Roman history into two main parts (there was also the time when kings ruled Rome, in its very early days, but semi-legendary period is usually seen more as a prologue to Roman history).

These two main parts are:

- The Republic (509 BCE to 27 BCE - this is the period we have described up to this point), with its elected officials, senate and assemblies. Under the Republic Rome grew from being a single city-state to being the mistress of a vast empire;

and

- The Empire (27 BCE to 476 CE), under which many of the old republican institutions continued to exist, but in reality it was a monarchy. During this period the Romans enjoyed two hundred years of almost unbroken peace, followed by two hundred years of long, slow decline (see below, from 260 CE).

(The date 476 CE was when the last emperor of the Western Roman Empire abdicated; but the Eastern Roman Empire continued for another thousand years. Modern scholars, however, give the term Byzantine Empire to this state.)

Slide 11: 180 CE

The reign of the first emperor, Augustus, brought peace and stability to the Roman world, This *Pax Romana* (Roman Peace) would last for more than two hundred years.

- Apart from a brief period of chaos in 68-69 CE, a long series of Roman emperors presided over two centuries of peace and stability (note 1).
- It was a time when law and order prevailed as never before - nor would again for more than a thousand years. The inhabitants of the empire mostly embraced the Roman way of life (note 2).
- This was also a time of prosperity for the inhabitants of the empire, as trade and industry expanded (note 3).
- During these centuries, successive emperors pushed out the empire's frontiers (note 4).
- Within the empire, the new religion of Christianity spread far and wide from its origins in Palestine (note 5).

Additional notes

1. The Emperors

Augustus and his family - the Julio-Claudian dynasty - ruled the empire until 68 CE. The last of them, the emperor Nero, misruled to the extent that a series of rebellions broke out, and in the year 68-69 CE, no less than four emperors came to power. Finally one of them, Vespasian, was able to reimpose stability, and his Flavian dynasty ruled from 69 CE to 96 CE.

The empire was then governed by the Five Good Emperors (96-180 CE) - Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius under whom the empire reached its peak, both in terms of territory and prosperity.

Apart from the year 68-69 CE, therefore, the empire experienced a large measure of internal peace and stability. Augustus worked hard to ensure that the provinces of the empire were well governed, and his successors continued this practice. Even under mad or incompetent emperors, such as

Nero and Gaius (Caligula), the emperor's officials carried on the routine work of government as normal.

2. The spread of the Roman way of life

For the most part, the Romans allowed conquered peoples to retain their own customs, laws and religion. However, especially in the western part of the empire, the Roman way of life, with its town life, public baths, aqueducts, forums, temples, theaters, amphitheaters, country villas, paved roads, high quality education and Latin language, spread rapidly.

In the eastern part of the empire, the Romans allowed the Greek-style (or "Hellenistic") civilization which covered the region (see notes on Slide 3, 270 BCE) to flourish. Many of today's ruins and artefacts from ancient Greek cities in fact date from the Roman period.

Roman law was adopted far and wide in both parts of the empire. New laws were added all the time, issued by both emperors and the senate. These covered all kinds of issues, to do with family life, business and much more - just like modern law.

Roman citizenship spread throughout all the provinces. Provincial elites increasingly became members of an international elite, which provided the top government officials of the empire. Descendants of tribal chieftains became Roman senators, and even Roman emperors.

3. Prosperity

The network of roads which the Romans built to span the empire were originally designed to move troops around quickly. They also made trade easier, however. The long peace - the Pax Romana - encouraged commerce and industry. Roman currency was accepted everywhere within the empire, and well beyond. Roman coins have been found as far away as India.

Rome, the greatest city in the world

Under these emperors, Rome became the largest and most magnificent city in the world. Successive emperors laid out forums and parks, erected triumphal arches, columns and other imperial monuments, and built amphitheaters (most famously the giant Colosseum), theaters, race tracks (like the Circus Maximus), huge public baths, and of course splendid palaces. Many large government buildings filled the city, and wealthy senators put up spacious mansions.

The poor in Rome lived in blocks of apartments. These were often badly built and sometimes liable to collapse. The unemployed were fed free bread. This came all the way from Egypt and North Africa.

Along with free bread, emperors laid on lavish entertainments. The main ones were the chariot races in the Circus Maximus and the games in the Colosseum, including wild animal hunts, gladiator fights and even mock sea battles.

4. The expansion of the empire

By the time of Augustus, Rome already ruled most of the Mediterranean world. Augustus and his successors further expanded the empire. Under Claudius, the Roman army invaded Britain. In the following decades it brought the whole southern part of the island into the empire. Roman rule also expanded over all of North Africa, up into central Europe, and east to include all of Asia Minor.

By the end of the first century, most of the Roman army was stationed along the frontiers of the empire. The only troops which were based in the interior, at Rome itself, were the Praetorian Guards, who were responsible for protecting the emperor, and some other units which policed Rome.

5. Religion in the Roman Empire

The traditional religion of the Romans consisted of the worship of many gods and goddesses, such as Jupiter, Mars and Venus. Under the empire, new religions came in from countries such as Egypt and Persia. The worship of emperors was also added.

The spread of Jewish communities

The major changes in religion came from the small country of Judaea. This was the original homeland of the Jewish people.

Jewish communities spread right around the Roman empire, and took their worship of the One God, Yahweh, with them. The Jewish dispersion (or Diaspora) was reinforced when the Jews rebelled twice, in 66 CE and 133 CE. After these they were prohibited from living in their homeland.

Christianity

The new religion of Christianity also originated in and around Judaea. This was based on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. He taught the need for compassion and forgiveness.

In about 33 CE Jesus was executed by the authorities. His disciples believed that he rose from the dead, however - a belief for which many of them were willing to die.

The new faith taught that Jesus was the Son of God. Through belief in him, all people - rich or poor, men and women, Jew, Greek, Roman or Barbarian - could receive God's forgiveness and eternal life.

Christian missionaries - most notably, Paul of Tarsus - spread the Christian message around the empire. In this, they were greatly helped by the existence of Roman roads and trade networks along which they could travel.

From the start, Christians were imprisoned and killed for their faith. Their numbers continued to grow, however, and their teaching soon spread to every corner of the empire.

Slide 12: 260 CE

At the end of the second century CE, the Roman Empire began a long decline.

- The last of the Five Good Emperors, Marcus Aurelius, died in 180 CE. The empire would never again know the same level of stability it had enjoyed in the second century (note 1).
- In the Third Century CE, political instability and barbarian invasion engulfed the empire (note 2).
- By the mid-Third Century the Roman empire looked as if it was breaking up. Three different rulers governed different parts of the empire (note 3).

Additional notes

1. The end of the long peace

In the late Second Century CE a plague swept through the Roman Empire. This reduced its population, along with its wealth and its ability to defend itself.

On Marcus Aurelius' death in 180 CE, his worthless son Commodus came to the throne. He was assassinated in 192 CE, and civil war soon broke out between powerful frontier generals to decide who would be emperor.

The winner was Septimius Severus, and he and his family, the Severan dynasty, ruled Rome (with a very short break in 217), until 235 CE.

2. The Third Century Crisis

Under the Severan dynasty the empire remained more or less at peace, but after 235 it was not to know proper peace for fifty years.

Up to now, the Romans had by and large kept the barbarian tribes on their European frontiers at bay. Now, this all changed. Germans and other tribal groups swarmed over the western frontiers along the rivers Rhine and Danube.

At the same time, to the east of the Roman Empire, a new Persian dynasty came to power. This was the Sassanids. They were much more warlike than the old Parthian kings had been. They soon began mounting major attacks on Rome's eastern frontiers.

These invasions triggered half a century of crisis. One emperor was killed in battle against the invaders, another was captured by the Persians. In these dangerous times emperors failed to gain the loyalty of the troops, and rebellion after rebellion broke out against them. No emperor lasted for more than a few years on the throne. Not one died peacefully in his bed.

3. An empire divided

By 260 CE the empire had divided into three parts:

- Central Portion : The "legitimate" line of emperors ruled the central portion of the empire: Italy, North Africa, the Balkans;
- Western Portion: A general called Postumus and his successors, whom scholars call the "Gallic" emperors, ruled the western provinces in Gaul, Germany, Spain and Britain;
- Eastern portion: In the wake of a great Persian invasion, when the frontier defences almost completely collapsed, the native ruler of the frontier city of Palmyra, Odanathus, took control and successfully pushed back the Persian forces. He then continued to govern Syria independently of the emperor. After his assassination, his widow Zenobia stepped into his shoes and expanded Palmyrene power by bringing other eastern provinces, including Egypt, under her control.

Slide 13: 337 CE

The unity of the Roman Empire was restored under a series of soldier-emperors - and they transform the way the empire was run.

- These soldier-emperors were men of humble origin who had risen through the ranks of the army (note 1).
- After re-uniting the empire and repelling the invaders, they carried out far-reaching changes to the way the empire was run (note 2).
- The Third Century and early Fourth Century also saw a major change in the Roman Empire's religious life (note 3).

Additional notes

1. Soldier emperors

The empire survived thanks to a succession of very capable emperors. They were not drawn from the aristocracy. Most came from frontier regions, especially the Danube provinces, and had long experience as professional soldiers.

The early soldier-emperors included Claudius Gothicus (reigned 268-70 CE), Aurelian (reigned 270-275 - under him the empire was reunited) and Probus (reigned 276-282). These spend their entire reigns fighting against rebels and invaders. They succeeded in restoring the frontiers to almost their position before the Crisis set in.

2. An empire transformed

The most famous of the later soldier-emperors were Diocletian (reigned 284-305 CE) and Constantine the Great (reigned 306-337 CE). Both these emperors carried out huge changes to the way the empire was governed and defended.

Some of these changes were as follows:

- There were usually two or three emperors at any one time, each with his own capital. The emperor with responsibility for the eastern provinces was always based at Constantinople (named after the emperor Constantine, who founded it). None was now ever stationed at Rome.
- The senators had lost their place as the empire's generals and governors. These were now professional soldiers and career civil servants, from more humble ranks of society.
- In the early Roman Empire the backbone of the Roman army had been the legions, stationed along the frontiers of the empire. Now the best troops were concentrated in large mobile field armies stationed some distance from the frontiers. They were held ready to move up to any trouble spot as required.
- A large proportion of soldiers in these armies were now of barbarian origin. This was true not only for ordinary soldiers, but for the officers and generals as well.
- The provinces were now much smaller than before, and were grouped together into vicariates, and these in turn into three or four dioceses. These were headed by the most senior officials in the empire.

- Towns and cities no longer ran their own affairs to nearly the same extent that they had done earlier. Large numbers of imperial officials now supervised them closely.

3. Changes in the empire's religious life

Over the previous two centuries a new religion, Christianity, had been making steady progress in winning converts throughout the Roman Empire. The Third Century, however, was a difficult time for Christians. During this troubled period, some emperors blamed that religion for the empire's misfortunes, and a series of empire-wide persecutions of the religion took place. Emperors ordered their officials to imprison and kill those who did not give up their faith.

Then, out of the blue, the emperor Constantine converted to Christianity. He stopped any further persecutions of the Christians, and proclaimed that everyone should be free to follow any religion they chose.

From that time on, with only one exception, all Roman emperors were Christians. Following the emperors' example, more and more people began to join the Christian church.

Slide 14: 395 CE

In this year, the Roman Empire was divided into two, the western and eastern halves.

- On his death the emperor Theodosius the Great (reigned 379-395) divided the empire into its Eastern and Western halves, each under its own emperor (note 1).
- During the fourth century, the Christian Church became rich and powerful. The emperor Theodosius made it the official religion of the empire (note 2).

Additional notes

1. Multiplying troubles and the division of the empire

At the end of the Fourth Century, troubles began multiplying again for the Roman Empire. A major cause of this was the march of a people known as the Huns.

The Huns were a people from central Asia. At this time in their history they were moving westwards, towards the Roman Empire. Their warlike reputation struck fear even into other "barbarians", like the German tribes who had troubled the Romans for so long.

Catastrophe!

One of these tribes, the Goths, stood in the Huns' path. In 378 CE, desperate to escape the Huns, the Goths tried to cross into the empire. This led to trouble with local Roman officials, whom the Goths massacred. They then headed south, deep into Roman lands, and at the Battle of Adrianople they destroyed a Roman army (and a Roman emperor) which came to deal with them.

A new emperor, Theodosius the Great, settled the Goths within the empire, where they lived peacefully for about 20 years.

After a period of comparative peace, troubles began to multiply again for the empire in the later Fourth Century. To help deal with these, Theodosius ordered that after his death the empire was to

be divided into two. One of his sons, Honorius, was assigned the west, while the other, Arcadius, the east.

The empire would never be reunited again, until the western half vanished altogether less than a century later. After that, there would only be a single capital again, but this would be Constantinople, not Rome.

2. The Christian Church becomes rich and powerful

During the fourth century, many Christians, rich and poor, began leaving their property to the Church on their deaths (or even before). The Church started gaining in wealth. Bishops became leading figures in their communities.

Not all Christians were pleased with this development. An increasing number joined communities in isolated locations to practice their faith in a simple way, free from “worldly” concerns. These communities were the first Christian monasteries. These would become more and more numerous, and have a major influence in Medieval Europe.

Christianity becomes the official religion of the Roman Empire

In 381, the emperor Theodosius decreed Christianity to be the official religion of the Roman Empire. Furthermore, only “orthodox” Christianity (i.e. that version of Christianity agreed to by the emperor) would count as the official state religion.

Slide 15: 410 CE

At the beginning of the fifth century, the frontier defences of the western Roman Empire collapsed, never to be rebuilt.

- From about 406 CE, German tribes poured across the Rhine frontier into the western Roman provinces (note 1).
- In 410 CE, the Goths sacked Rome, sending a shock wave right around the empire (note 2).

More information

1. The collapse of the frontiers of the Western Roman Empire

After 395 CE, the two halves of the empire operated more or less independently of each other. Taxes collected by each half's government were spent within its own sphere.

This put the west at a disadvantage. The western provinces were poorer than those of the east. Also, the western frontiers were longer than in the east. The western government therefore had less to spend on defending much longer borders.

In the early fifth century, the frontier defences of the western Roman Empire collapsed, never to be rebuilt. German tribes poured across the Rhine frontier into the western Roman provinces. They were soon moving far and wide across Gaul, and on into Spain and later North Africa.

Modern historians think that, like the Goths before them, they were fleeing from the fearsome Huns as these moved westwards. Whatever their motives, they caused devastation wherever they went. Towns were sacked, villas burnt and people fled.

In 410 the Roman army in Britain was ordered across into Gaul, to help deal with the troubles there. It never returned. The Britons were forced to organize their own defences.

2. The sack of Rome

In the early Fifth Century the Goths marched into Italy. The Roman government unwisely refused their demands for payment. The Goths therefore sacked Rome, in 410 CE.

The sack did little damage to Rome, but it sent a shockwave around the Roman world. It had not been the capital of the empire for more than a century, but it stood as the heart and soul of the Roman people.

Slide 16: 456 CE

The troubles of the period continue for the Western Roman Empire, as the emperor and his officials gradually lose control of the provinces.

- The German groups which had invaded the western provinces of the Roman Empire in the early Fifth Century all soon set up kingdoms of their own (note 1).
- In 451 CE the much-feared Huns invaded Gaul, but were defeated by a Roman and Visigothic army (note 2).
- In 455 CE the city of Rome suffered a second sack (note 3).

More information

1. The German kingdoms

The German-ruled kingdoms covered parts of Gaul (modern France), Spain and Portugal, and North Africa.

Some kingdoms (the Visigoths and Burgundians, for example) pay lip-service to the Roman emperor as their superior, but they are all in fact independent.

In most of these, Roman civilization continues, although badly damaged. In Britain, however, things are different. Here, the inhabitants are having to defend themselves against Saxon raiders and invaders without military aid from the rest of the empire. They are fighting a losing battle, and literate, Christian, city-based life is vanishing fast.

2. The Huns

In the early fifth century the Huns had based themselves in eastern Europe, and mounted raids into Roman territory. They caused immense destruction, leaving large stretches depopulated.

Then they marched westward into Gaul under their leader Attila (451 CE). Such an invasion had been long feared by both Romans and Germans. In the event, however, the Huns were defeated by a joint Roman-Visigoth army under a Roman general at the Battle of Catalaunum.

Within a few years, Attila died and the Hun power subsided as rival leaders quarrelled among themselves.

3. The Vandals sack Rome

In North Africa, a German tribe called the Vandals built a large fleet. In 455 CE they sacked Rome. This did not have the same traumatic effect that the first one had done, but was much more destructive.

The word "Vandal" came to mean someone who destroys things just for the sake of it.

Slide 17: 500 CE

In the later Fifth Century, the Western Roman Empire vanished entirely.

- While Roman rule vanished, however, much of Roman influence remained (note 1).
- The Eastern Roman Empire would continue for another thousand years (note 2).

Additional notes

1. The end of the western Roman Empire

In the years after 456, the German kingdoms in the western provinces expanded their territory until eventually there were no areas left under Roman rule (the last vanished in 486 CE).

Meanwhile, in 476 CE, Odoacer, the German leader who dominated Italy took the title of king of Italy. At the same time he arranged for the abdication of the last of the western Roman emperors. This was a young boy named Romulus Augustulus.

The end of Roman civilization in the west

The decline of Roman power in the west had gone hand-in-hand with the decline of Roman civilization there. The great Roman towns were shrinking, the beautiful villas mostly gone, and the well-built roads were beginning to fall into disrepair. The Latin language had begun to morph into the modern languages of French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Catalanian and Provençal. Roman-style education declined and most people were ceasing to be literate.

Roman influence was far from dead, however. To help them govern their new kingdoms, the German rulers needed the help of Roman officials, who kept alive Roman government practices. Most of their populations still lived under a form of Roman law. Christian monks preserved as much Roman and Greek writing as they could.

The exception to all this was Britain. Here, a German people called the Anglo-Saxons began to settle in Britain in large numbers. Most traces of Roman civilization there quickly vanished - city-life, literacy, Christianity and much more.

2. The Eastern Roman Empire continues

In the Eastern Roman Empire, life continued very much as before. The eastern provinces had always been wealthier than the western ones. Since the division of the empire in 395, the emperors in Constantinople had been able to maintain a large army. This had been able to defend the eastern provinces effectively.

Despite many ups and downs, the Eastern Roman Empire would endure for almost another thousand years. Modern scholars call it the Byzantine Empire, to emphasise the differences between it and the old Roman Empire. The Byzantines were Greek in language and culture, not Latin. They continued to think of themselves as Romans, however.

Finally, their empire came to an end in 1453, when Constantinople fell to the Turks. This was just a generation before Columbus discovered America.

Questions

1. Who were the people of central/northern Italy against whom the Romans rebelled to form their Republic?
2. What central Italian people did the Romans belong to, whose language they spoke?
3. What were the two chief magistrates of the Roman republic called?
4. To which class of Roman society did the most important families in the early Republic belong?
5. To which people did the raiders belong who nearly destroyed Rome in around 390 BCE?
6. What was the name of the king who came over to Italy to defend the Greek cities of southern Italy against the Romans?
7. What was the name of the great trading city in North Africa against whom the Romans fought three wars?
8. Who was the brilliant general who almost destroyed the Romans in the Second Punic War?
9. The First Triumvirate was made up of Pompey, Crassus and - who?
10. What (at the time) semi-mythical island did this general invade in 55 and 54 BCE?
11. What was the name of this general's adopted son and heir?
12. What religion began to spread around the Roman empire in the 1st century CE?
13. Name one of the five able emperors who ruled the empire in the 2nd century CE
14. Which emperor became a Christian and established Christianity as the dominant religion of the Roman empire?
15. What was the name of the new capital of the Eastern Roman empire which this emperor established?
16. Which German tribe sacked Rome in 410 CE?
17. What was the name of the king under whom the Huns reached the height of their power in the mid-5th century CE?
18. What German people(s) settled in Britain in the 5th century CE?
19. What German tribe settled in North Africa and sacked Rome for a second time in 455 CE?
20. Name one of the languages that Latin was evolving into at this time

Appendix

TimeMaps articles for further reading

Here is a selected list of the key articles which students should find most helpful.

[The Civilization of Ancient Rome](#)

[The History of the Roman Empire](#)

[The Etruscans](#)

[Ancient Carthage](#)

[The Civilization of Ancient Greece](#)

[The History of Ancient Greece](#)

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

[Hellenistic civilization](#)

[The Parthian Empire](#)

[The Sasanian Empire](#)

[History of Ancient Palestine](#)