

P. The Rise of the Roman Empire

1. Until the year 264 BC, Rome gradually came to dominate Italy, and extend its republic.
2. Conquered cities in Italy could earn their way to full citizenship and rights.
 - a) In times of war when Rome needed help against a new adversary, the conquered cities would also have to provide troops.
 - b) As Romans, they could travel to Rome to participate in the assemblies, and their own nobles were recognized as patricians. They also received all the legal protections of Roman citizens.
 - c) As allies, they were given land as a reward for fighting, and if they continued to please Rome, they would get full citizenship.
3. Unfortunately, Rome's success in Italy led to a contest with the north African city of Carthage over control of the western Mediterranean.
4. The Carthaginians were themselves colonists from Phoenicia (modern-day Lebanon) who had settled in northern Africa, in what is today Tunisia. Their capital was Carthage, and their empire included Sicily, Corsica, Sardinia, and part of Spain. (The "Punic Wars" are known by this name because the Romans called the Phoenicians the "Punici.")
5. The war between them was rooted in the simple cause of rivalry over land.
6. Because of their three wars (264-146 BC), and because of their very different culture, the Romans decided to rule the Carthaginians outright, and deny them a path to Roman citizenship. Sicily (previously held by Carthage) thus became the first Roman "province." This meant that the Romans were not going to let its people be a part of the republic.

Q. Slavery and the Decline of the Republic

1. By the end of the Third Punic War (146 BC), the Romans had conquered Greece, Spain, and much of northern Africa and Turkey.
2. They had also enslaved many of the people of these regions.
3. Because there were so many slaves available to the Romans, slaves were not valued as highly as before. The price of slaves dropped, and Romans bought more of them.
4. The Romans also treated slaves very badly, because they could easily be replaced.
5. In Sicily, the first Roman province, the Romans held many slaves, and because they treated them so badly, there were a number of rebellions called "*servile wars*," among the most famous of which was led by the gladiator Spartacus, whose gladiator army was ultimately defeated despite the fighting prowess of its warriors.
6. The Romans did not decide to give up slavery, even though in principle in a right-respecting republic, individuals are not allowed to have power over one another. Unfortunately, this is an example of how slavery was viewed as a *normal* part of life, and no one could summon a proper moral understanding of why it should be abandoned based on Roman values.

R. The Fall of the Roman Republic

1. Desperate for someone to restore the character of the republic, the Romans turned to various charismatic leaders who promised some form of restoration, the most famous and pivotal of which was Julius Caesar.
2. Caesar had conquered Gaul (France today), and decided to try to make himself king by leading his army back to Rome.
3. On occasion, Caesar's friend and prominent Roman Marc Antony would offer Caesar a crown in public, but the reaction of the people was always negative, because the Romans still viewed monarchy so badly.
4. Fearing he would become king, a conspiracy including one of the descendants of Lucius Junius Brutus named Marcus Brutus assassinated Caesar on the "Ides of March" (March 15) in 44 BC.
5. The result, however, was not the securing of the republic, but a tragic civil war between Caesar's previous allies and his previous enemies that led to Caesar's nephew Octavian becoming the first real Roman emperor.

S. The Roman Empire

1. After winning the civil war, Octavian was granted the powers of a consul, a tribune, a censor, and more all at once – effectively making him a monarch. He was more calculating than Caesar in this regard, because he achieved all the power of a king, but never sought the actual title of "king" or "emperor" or anything like it.
2. Octavian was granted the honorary name of "Augustus," i.e. "illustrious one." He was also honored with the title "Imperator," meaning "great conqueror." Perhaps the most symbolic way he maintained the pretense of a republic was that he was addressed as "Princeps" ("first citizen").
3. Since he had no surviving son, Augustus had to choose from among other possible candidates to try to establish some kind of hereditary monarchy. He chose his son-in-law, and an accomplished general, Tiberius.
4. Tiberius was worried about another successful general who had conquered parts of Germany, and who thus became known as "Germanicus," so he had Germanicus assassinated, but that did not stop others from conspiring against him. Germanicus's son Caligula had Tiberius assassinated and took his place.
5. From this point on, the usual mode of succession in the empire was replacement by assassination.
6. After this, Rome made no contributions to human history. All that matters about this story is just how big the empire got, and how it died.
7. By 117 AD, the Roman empire had reached its maximum extent, reaching across from Portugal to Mesopotamia, and south from Egypt up into Britain in the north. The following maps provide two views of the empire's size. The latter is a useful overlay of the empire compared to the present-day continental United States.



Map of the Roman Empire at its greatest extent (c.117 AD) — and shown compared to the present-day United States.

T. The Decline of the Roman Empire

1. After 117 AD, when Rome could grow no more, it naturally began to shrink.
2. Feeling the strain of managing the empire, the emperor Diocletian divided the empire into *four* - a system of rule known as the *tetrarchy*!
3. The presence of four co-rulers was supposed to discourage assassination, since it was harder to seize control when power was so decentralized.
4. It also facilitated the defense of the empire, by placing the rulers directly in charge of those areas that need their attention.
5. A crucial problem, however, was that it was very expensive to have four emperors. They all had courts, with all the trappings. And so taxes rose, making life harder on the people in the empire. And it was only natural that eventually one of them would think he would be better off without the others, before they did the same to him.
6. This is indeed what happened when the emperor of Gaul & Britain, named Constantine decided he could achieve sole imperial power, and drove his army towards Rome.
7. Of great importance to his campaign and to later history, Constantine was a Christian. For centuries after the life of Jesus, belief in Christianity slowly but steadily spread within the Roman world, and even resisted the most horrific forms of persecution



A famous sculptural depiction of the *Tetrarchy* - a mutually supporting system of four emperors ruling at the same time in different parts of the empire devised by Diocletian c.293 AD.

leveled against it by Roman emperors, who insisted on not merely being obeyed as rulers, but worshipped as gods.

8. The unstoppable faith of the Christians must have made a powerful impression on Romans looking for a more meaningful way to live now that their own society was so dismal. The number of Christian believers steadily grew, until even the highest ranks of Roman society included Christians among them—even emperors.
9. As the story goes, Constantine had a vision of the Christian cross, in which he was told “in hoc signo vinces” (Latin for “by this sign, you shall conquer.”) After his victory over his Italian rival in the Battle of Milvian Bridge, Constantine then issued the *Edit of Milan* of 313 AD, which made Christianity legal in the Roman empire. It was the first step towards the eventual triumph of Christianity in Roman culture, even as the empire itself was collapsing.