

Chapter 7 Section 1 --- The Roman Republic

Key Terms:

Republic	– a government in which citizens who have the right to vote select their leaders
Consul	– one of two officials who led the Roman Republic
Patrician	– a member of an upper-class family in the Roman Republic
Veto	– the rejection of any planned action or rule by a person in power
Dictator	– a ruler who has total control of the government

In ancient times, young Romans were told a legend about the founding of their state. The main characters in the story were twin brothers, Romulus and Remus. They were the children of a princess and Mars, the Roman god of war. A jealous king feared that the twins would someday seize power from him. He ordered them to be drowned. However, a mother wolf rescued the infants. Then a shepherd found the twins and raised them as his own. The twins grew up, killed the king, and went off to build their own city. At a place where seven hills rise above the Tiber River, they founded the city of Rome.

Rome's Geography

We can learn much from the story of Rome's founding --- even if it is mostly legend. We learn that the Romans valued loyalty and justice. People who broke the law would be severely punished, just as the king was punished. We also learn that the Romans believed that having the favor of the gods was very important.

Geographical Advantages: The first people who settled on Rome's seven hills were not thinking about building a great empire. They chose that site because it seemed to be a good place to live. The hills made the area easy to defend. The soil was fertile, and the area had a good source of water. From the mountains of central Italy, the Tiber River flowed through Rome before emptying into the Tyrrhenian Sea. But as time passed, the people of Rome discovered that the location of their city gave them other advantages. Rome was at the center of the long, narrow peninsula we now call Italy. Italy was at the center of the Mediterranean Sea. And the Mediterranean Sea was at the center of the known Western world.

The Etruscans: We know very little about the people who actually founded Rome. However, we do know that their first settlements date from about the 900 B.C. Rome grew slowly, as the Romans fought their neighbors for more land.

About 600 B.C., a group of people, the Etruscans took power in Rome. They spoke a language unlike any other in Italy. Although we have many examples of their writing, we can read very little of it. Where had they come from? Even today, no one is sure. For a time,

Etruscan kings ruled Rome. However, in 509 B.C., the Romans revolted and drove the Etruscans from power.

Although the Romans defeated the Etruscans, they adopted Etruscan ideas. For example, many of the Romans gods were originally Etruscan. The Romans even borrowed the Greek alphabet that the Etruscans used. The Roman garment called the toga also came from the Etruscans.

Romans Form a Republic:

After driving the last Etruscan king from the throne, the Romans vowed never again to put so much trust in kings. They wanted a government that did not rely on the will of one ruler.

How the Republic Worked: The Romans created a new form of government, a republic. In a **republic**, citizens who have the right to vote select their leaders. The leaders rule in the name of the people. The Roman Republic was led by two chief officials, called consuls. However, the most powerful part of the government was a group called the senate. The senate advised the consuls on foreign affairs, laws, and finances, among other things. Consuls almost always took the senate's advice.

At first, the senate was made up of only 300 men called patricians. A **Patrician** was a member of a wealthy, upper-class family in the Roman Republic. The consuls were also patricians. Ordinary citizens were known as plebeians. In the early republic, plebeians could not hold office or be senators. In 367 B.C., a new law said that at least one consul had to be a plebeian. From that point on, plebeians could also be senators.

The power of the consuls was limited. Consuls ruled for one year only. Also, power was divided equally between the consuls. Both had to agree before the government could take any action. If only one consul said "Veto" (I forbid it), the matter was dropped. A veto is the rejection of any planned action by a person in power. Today, we use veto to mean the rejection of a bill by the President of the United States or a state governor.

The Romans knew that their government might fail if the two consuls disagreed in an emergency. For that reason, Roman law allowed that a dictator could be appointed for six months to handle an emergency. A **dictator** is a ruler who has total control of the government.

Patricians Versus Plebeians: Within about 250 years, Rome had conquered almost all of Italy. As Rome grew wealthy from conquest, troubles arose between the patricians and the plebeians.

Many patricians benefited from Rome's conquests. They took riches from the people they defeated. These riches helped them buy land from small farmers to create huge farms for themselves. Slaves brought back from conquest worked on these farms. As a result,

plebeian farmers found themselves without work. The cities, especially Rome, were filled with jobless plebeians. Mistrustful of the patrician senate, plebeians formed groups to protect their own interests.

Eventually, angry plebeians refused to fight in the Roman army. It was then that the patricians gave in to one of the main demands of the plebeians --- a written code of laws called the Laws of the Twelve Tables. The Twelve Tables applied equally to all citizens. Despite the victory, the plebeians never had as much power as the patricians.

Master of the Mediterranean: While patricians and plebeians fought for power in Rome, Roman armies conquered new territories under a policy of imperialism, the practice of gaining control over foreign lands and peoples. Roman armies invaded territories controlled by Carthage, a North African city in the present-day country of Tunisia. After a series of bloody wars, the armies destroyed Carthage and its empire. They also seized control of Spain. Other Roman armies conquered Greece. Then, the Romans turned their attention to conquering the people of Gaul, who lived in present-day France and nearby lands.

The Decline of the Republic

By 120 B.C., Rome was in trouble. Over the next 75 years, a number of generals gathered private armies and fought for power. Consuls no longer respected each other's veto power. Rome fell into civil disorder, with private armies roaming the streets and murdering their enemies. As Rome seemed about to break up, Julius Caesar arose as a strong leader.

The Rise of Julius Caesar: Caesar was eager for power. From 58 to 51 B.C., he had led his army in conquering Gaul. His strong leadership won him the loyalty of his troops. They would follow him anywhere – even back to Rome to seize power.

In 49 B.C., Caesar returned to Italy. War broke out between Caesar and the senate. Caesar won the war and became dictator of the Roman world in 48 B.C. Recall that under Roman law, a dictator could rule for only six months. Caesar's rule, however, was to last longer. Although some elements of the republic remained, Caesar ruled with great power. In 45 B.C., he became the only consul. In 44 B.C., he became dictator for life. Caesar made many important government reforms. But many senators hated the idea that Rome seemed to be once again ruled by a king.

The Death of a Dictator: On March 15, 44 B.C., Caesar attended a meeting of the senate. At the meeting, a group of senators gathered around Caesar. Suddenly, they drew knives and stabbed him. He fell to the ground, dead. Caesar had been a strong leader, but many Romans felt that he had gone too far, and too fast, in gathering power.

From Republic to Empire: Civil war followed soon after Caesar's death. When war ended 13 years later, Caesar's adopted son, Octavian, held power. In 27 B.C., the senate awarded

Octavian the title Augustus, which means “highly respected.” He was the first emperor of Rome.

The Roman Republic had lasted nearly 500 years. The government worked well for much of that time. As a republic, Rome had grown from a city-state to a holder of vast territories. Rome had the largest elected government the world had seen to that point. But it finally faltered and died. With Augustus, the Roman Empire was born. A civilization that had raised a republic would live under absolute rule for about the next 500 years.

Questions:

What is known about the Etruscans?

What complaints did the plebeians have against the patricians?

What events followed the death of Julius Caesar?

Guided Reading: These questions are attached to your daily email. 😊