

The Romans, by Antony Kamm: A Synopsis

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The Founding of Rome

The Era of the Romans can be divided into three parts. The first era is seen as beginning with the founding of the city until 510 B.C., the date when the last of the Roman Kings was ejected. The second period is time of the Republic of Rome from 509 B.C. to 27 B.C. when Augustus seized rule and the Republican period ended. The final period is Imperial Rome when Rome was ruled by Emperors. This final period lasted until 476 A.D. when Romulus Augustus was deposed by Odoacer, a German who ruled Italy as a King. The Eastern part of the Roman Empire carried on into the Middle Ages, but finally collapsed when Constantinople was captured by Turk Muhammad II.

There is considerable legend surrounding the founding of the city of Rome. Actually there are two such legends. One goes something like this: A local king, Numitor of Alba Longa was ejected by his younger brother Amulius. To secure his position, Amulius murdered Numitor's sons and also forced his daughter Rhea to become a Vestal virgin, thus, he thought, preventing her from having any children. However, Rhea caught the eye of the god Mars and while she slept he had fathered two children, Romulus and Remus.

Rhea was thrown into the Tiber as were the two sons. Rhea was saved by the God of the river who married her and the twins floated to safety in a basket. They were finally cared for by a she-wolf until the the royal shephard cared for them them and revealed their ancestry. In due course Numitor was restored to his throne and as part of the celebrations for the event the brother resolved to found a new city. They took omens to determine where the city should be located. While they were marking the boundaries should be located. While they were marking the boundaries Remus jumped over one of the boundaries and in a fit of anger Romulus killed Remus. The story goes on that the city was short of women and so they invited a neighboring tribe from Sabine and abducted 600 women to help populate the city.

A second founding tradition is that the origins of Rome trace back to the legendary Greek hero Aeneas, son of mortal father and the goddess Venus. He fought against the Greeks in the Trojan war and after many wanderings founded the dynasty from which Romulus eventually came. This history is depicted in the famous work by Virgil called the Aeneid which was commissioned by Augustus. The emperors preferred this heroic legend.

As far as historically verifiable facts we know that the Latins who first settled on the Palatine Hill had been in the region since about 1000 B.C. largely herding sheep and goats. Rome was strategically located. The sea, only 2-3 kilometers, offered potential for trade. Near the base of the hill was the was the most convenient place for crossing the Tiber, which itself was the main transportation route along Western Italy. It was midway between north and south of Italy and furthermore Italy itself was central to the entire Mediterranean world.

There was considerable influence from Etruria which was across the Tiber to the North. From 650-600 B.C., the Etruscans crossed the Tiber and occupied Latium. It was at this time that the disparate communities of the region joined forces to fight off the Etruscans. From this time on we have the names of six Kings about whom we know little is known except their names and the fact that they were in all likelihood real historical figures.

The Roman talent for empire building started in the period of the Kings. The most significant step in Empire building came with the defeat of Alba Longa. They also assumed religious ceremony when King Servius Tullius transferred the festival of Diana to Rome. During this time the King ruled with ultimate power. Still though there were signs of the development of a future republic. There were three tribes and each tribe was divided into 10 curiae whose representatives were responsible for civil affairs. Servius Tullius was also credited with giving the army political status via the assembly called, comitia centuriata. Even under the first king Numa Pompilius workers were represented in guilds.

At this time the Romans did not use money but instead bartered. A head of cattle (pecus) was a common monetary unit (hence pecunia > money). The Etruscans helped pass along considerable engineering expertise. The planning of the great temple to Jupiter started under the King Tarquinus Superbus. The King enlisted the work of many poor people to complete this temple, a fact that was most unpopular. Eventually a band of nobles led by Lucius Junius (later known as Brutus) overthrew the last of the Roman Kings. It is possible too that the revolt was part of a larger conspiracy of other Latium states against a King of Etruscan origin.

Tarquinus escaped and since he commanded support from the Etruscans, was still a danger to Rome. In fact one of his chiefs, Porsenna, occupied Rome. Etruscan attempts to recapture Rome continued until 505 B.C. when the Etruscans

themselves were overtaken by an Army of Greek auxiliaries who were called on to bolster the Latin army. And in the meantime, Rome had become a republic.

The Republic

The change from monarchy to republic was gradual. The society was essentially divided into two classes, free and enslaved. The society was essentially divided into two classes, free and enslaved. It was a true democracy and began as a state ruled by the upper classes. The upper classes consisted of senators who qualified for the upper class by birth or wealth and knights (equites) who qualified by virtue of holding land. State religion was in the hands of a high priest (pontifex).

The function of the King was now taken by two consuls, elected for one year terms. There was natural tension between the wealthy and plebes; however Gaius Marcius Rutilius became the first plebian dictator in 356 B.C.

As Rome expanded, the tasks of government increased accordingly. A partial list of government positions included: Censor (tax collector), Praetor (chief law officer), Aedile (public works), Quaestor (assistant to consuls), Senate (300 members), Comitia curiata (representatives of areas in Rome), Comitia centuriata (elected state officials declared war, established treaties, approved legislation).

One important sign of the freedom from the tyranny of the Kings was the development of statutory laws. The laws formed by a panel of 10 selected men (decem viri) were known as the twelve tables. Formulated in 451 B.C. the laws most importantly assumed that all classes of society should be under the same laws. As such they were the starting point of all Roman law and in fact European law.

There was also a lengthy process of Rome evolving from a city state into an Empire. By 339 B.C. the Latin league of states dissolved and final vestiges of independent Etruscan forces were eliminated. By 265 B.C. Rome occupied all the territory south of the Arno river. They also defended themselves against attacks from the Gauls. In war the Romans already exhibited a somewhat enlightened approach to how they treated the vanquished. They assumed the conquered society by various means, allowing trade and intermarriage and selected voting rights.

However, there was also a constant underlying theme in the society of the unjust treatment of the lower classes by the aristocracy. Leaders from the lower classes could emerge from their central role in the armed forces to become political forces. One such leader was Cato the Censor, who contributed significantly to standards in public life and increasing Roman sense of their own culture.

The Punic wars represent the first time Rome is acting internationally. The Punic wars saw Rome develop a significant sea force and assumed control of the Aegean. However, after Carthage succeeded in seizing southern Spain after the 1st Punic War, Rome was determined to seize the territory back and in the process of re-taking southern Spain demonstrated its widespread control of the Mediterranean. Carthage itself was destroyed in the 3rd Punic war.

The brothers Tiberius and his younger Gaius were born into the noble class in 168 and 159 B.C., respectively. They used their position and army service to rise to political power to enact laws with far reaching cultural significance. The main reform proposed and eventually put into law was the redistribution of large tracts of land which had been acquired by the state in its conquest of Italy. One of Tiberius' initiatives was to use popular assemblies to influence the senate. But he also used some questionable tactics to get his ideas implemented and in fact Tiberius was eventually killed. But Gaius, the younger brother took up where Tiberius left off, reenacting his brother's land laws and encouraging the broader power of the equestrian or business class of society.

Representing a more authoritarian aspect of Roman society which would eventually bring an end to the republic was Gaius Marius (157-86 B.C.). Since the Roman army was always made up of land holders, whenever Rome was at war some of the land would not be tended. For an agricultural society such a source of war conscripts was an inherent contradiction. As the conquests grew, even more men were needed for war. The wealth poured into the cities and the farmers became poorer, eventually migrating into the cities. Gaius Marius addressed this problem by recruiting Army members from the ranks of the urban poor. Gaius established himself as the head of a professional army. This spelled the end of the republic period as from this time on Rome was in the hands of whoever controlled the military.

In a most unusual situation a confederacy of southern states became fed up with not being involved in the decisions of the empire and eventually attacked. They lost the war but gained citizenship eventually. And in another peculiarity in the east, Mithridates, King of Pontus had attacked and killed 80,000 Roman soldiers and citizens. The senate appointed Sulla to lead a force against Mithridates. Some wanted Marius to lead the force and when such a law passed, Sulla marched on Rome to reverse the decision. It was the only time Rome was attacked by Romans.

It was Sulla who would eventually put forth the constitutional framework to put power back in the hands of the upper classes. As most leaders coming back from successful military campaigns, Sulla enjoyed much prestige and power. He reorganized the constitution for this purpose. And by 79 B.C., the Empire appeared much like an absolute monarchy.

The Caesars

After Sulla's death three new important leaders emerged. Marcus Licinius Crassus was a wealthy land developer. Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus (Pompey the Great) was a great military leader. The third, Gaius Julius Caesar developed into both a military leader and a political genius. When Caesar was elected consul in 60 B.C., they took advantage of the opportunity to form a triumvirate that ruled unconstitutionally for several years.

Marcus Tullius Cicero lived in these times. Cicero's art in oratory, especially in courts of law, was renowned. Having left Rome to avoid the political storm from one earlier trial, Cicero returned to Rome to serve as prosecutor against the corrupt Verres and began climbing the political ladder. He was elected consul in 63 B.C. and this time produced his famous orations against the conspirator Cataline and shamed him into leaving Rome. Cicero was not a supporter of the triumvirate and Caesar only reluctantly support his return to Rome.

Pompey the Great as notable for his swift destruction of bands of pirates that had threatened the normal economy of the Mediterranean area. After these victories he received a more conventional assignment to oppose Mithradates in Asia Minor. He joined forces with Caesar and Crassus and even took Julius Caesar's daughter Julia as his fourth wife.

There is the appearance that Julia's death in childbirth in 54 B.C. sparked the civil war between Caesar's forces and Pompey's army in a large family dispute. More likely, Caesar was consolidating power. He returned to the head of the army and pushed out Pompey's forces. Pompey escaped but was soon thereafter assassinated.

After serving on the triumvirate Caesar secured the governorship of Gaul. His many military campaigns left as many 2 million people dead but in the end he controlled a vast territory west of the Rhine. He made offensives across the Rhine to put down further incursions by Germanic tribes. By 47 B.C. he marched his army triumphantly back into Rome and for five months was like a sole ruler of the Empire. Caesar was seen as an innovative politician who made important changes in society and gave full voting rights to his former province. On the other hand, many of his changes were made too swiftly and he alienated the ruling aristocracy in the process. And five months after his return to Rome he was killed by former supporters of Pompey, Marcus Junius Brutus, and Gaius Cassius.

Caesar groomed several successors but it was his stepson Tiberus Claudius Nero who emerged as the new emperor following his death. Tiberus was somewhat of an absentee ruler and his rule appears to have been characterized by personal dalliances more than real societal progress.

Tiberus named two co-heirs, his own grandson Tiberus Gemellus and his last surviving great nephew Gaius Caesar, also known as Caligula, adopted Tiberus Gemellus but turned out to be a very unbalanced ruler. Mentally unstable he wasted much of the public funds. He was eventually murdered in a plot against him.

Gaius' cousin Claudius was spared in this coup and in fact was made an offer by the imperial guard to become the Imperial Guard's nominee for the next emperor. This reign lasted 14 years and was largely sound. His most far reaching act was the successful invasion of Britain.

Caligula's sister Agrippina had convinced Claudius to adopt her son Nero from a former marriage and to give Nero his daughter in marriage. Then she poisoned Claudius.

Nero became emperor in A.D. 54. He ruled in the time of a great fire in A.D. 64 which destroyed much of Rome. His response to the disaster was thought to be less than adequate, but in searching for a scapegoat he pointed the finger at a band of early Christians, who at that point in time were no more than a religious sect in Rome. Nero personally supervised the killing of many Christians. The tide of revolt against Nero was led by two governors, one from Gaul named Gaius Julius Vindex and the other from northern Spain, Servius. Before he could be killed Nero killed himself. Suipicius Galba was an Army commander called back by Nero to service in Rome. Galba's rise to power marked the end of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. Before he could even take power in Rome, Otho, former husband of Nero's daughter bribed the imperial guard and with their help killed Galba.

Otho was Emperor for only three months until losing a military battle after which he committed suicide. An appointee of Galba to the Lower Germania province marched into Rome mid-July A.D. 69 and seized power. This was Aulus Vitellus. But before this the forces in the Mediterranean pledged support to Titus Flavius Vespasianus. Vespasianus' forces prevailed and Vitellius was tortured in the streets.

Vespanious' rule can be said to be a return to sanity in terms of the Emperor serving in an administrative function in government. While not brilliant he was a reasonable steward of the public matters. His son Titus was successor. Titus had led successful military campaigns to subdue the Jews and the Arch of Titus in Rome celebratng these victories still stands. He also ruled in the time that the Colosseum was being built. Here wild beasts were slaughtered to please the Roman public. During his reign Mount Vesuvius erupted.

He died suddenly at the age of 40 and his brother Domitian reached Emperor. This period under The Flavian emperors is generally considered better managed than most. Taxes were regularly collected and the city of ROME took steps towards a more refined culture. But still killings to maintain power were frequent by Domitian. He however was killed by his own wifr and denied a state funeral and his name removed from state buildings.

Gods, Goddesses, and Mysteries

The Roman religious experience was not based on a central belief but rather a collection of myths and rituals that had been collected in their culture over a long period of time. Its practice was divided between a state cult which hoped to influence the outcome of worldly events, particularly wars, through public rituals. Beyond this the Roman religious experiences was limited to rituals that were usually led by the patriarch of the family.

The majority of Roman gods and goddesses were borrowed from Greek mythology, some by way of Etruscans and other tribes. Much of the religion also dealt with the attempt to examine natural phenomena as a foreteller of future events. This was consistent with the general animistic nature of their belief that invested such living things as animals and trees and inanimate objects such as lakes and springs with their own spirits.

The relationship between the gods and the people was one basically of gift giving and receiving. Essentially they believed that "spirits residing in natural and objects had the power to control the forces of nature and that man could influence these processes by symbolic action." The ways in which Romans believed they could have this influence was carried out in the ritual of prayer and ritual offering. Prayer was almost always accompanied with a sacrifice to the god being beseeched. The offerings were often animals. For example, the God Mars was usually offered a combination of ox, pig, and sheep. Human sacrifice was not typical but also not unknown.

The Romans also greatly believed in omens. A sibyl was a Greek prophetess and the Romans in the time of Tarquinus Superbus greatly admired a set of books known as the Sybilline books which were consulted on the order of the senate in times of crisis and calamity. The taking of omens or auspices (which means signs from the birds) was a regular procedure before any state activities.

Both Vesta, goddess of the fire and hearth and Janus, god of doorways were important both in family and national worship. Prayers were said to Vesta everyday and she was particularly important to the women of the household. The particular spirits were called lares or penates. These smaller family deities had their own cupboards in the Roman home and prayers were offered to them as well. Births, marriage, and deaths all had special rituals too.

Worship in agricultural regions was characterized by rituals to secure a successful harvest. The beginning of planting season in April for example was practically a non-stop festival for this purpose. Ceres the goddess of agriculture had a festival on April 19. The fall time saw corresponding rituals for the harvest. Consus, god of granary and Ops, god harvest and wealth were beneficiaries of these rites and sacrifices.

At the state level religious life was officially directed by four colleges, The College of Pontiffs, whose members, under the direction of the Pontifex Maximus, were generally elected political officials.

Daily Life, Work, and Entertainment

For those non-slaves in Roman society, life was full of considerable leisure time. And to fulfill much of the economic needs of a rich society Rome depended greatly on imports from the provinces. The provinces were required to pay taxes to Rome and meet other export goals. The state itself spent considerable money on public works projects and its army. Roman emperors also had access to great wealth usually in the form of control over vast tracts of land.

A typical work day for a free man was just six hours and usually early in the morning. In the afternoon the people would gather in the city and also head for the bath houses. Women were for the most part dedicated to household activities. Even the rather cushy job of going out to receive the regular subsidies of food were reserved for the men.

There were certain jobs that a few women did attain such as educator, clerk, or secretary, but this was not common. In general though, women were thought to need "guardian help" of a husband or father.

The Romans perpetuated the use of slavery. Slavery was part of the fabric of Roman life and the slaves were generally well treated, but still corporal discipline was known. There was hardly any aspect of life in which slaves were not involved. A slave could purchase his freedom from his owner. A freed slave had all the rights of a citizen except to hold the public office. Some slaves became even richer than their previous owners.

At the beginning of the Republic education was left in the hands of parents. From about 250 B.C. imported educated Greek slaves were employed as tutors in the home of the rich. Towards the end of the Republic a two-tier system emerged. Boys started a primary school at the age of 7 and concluded at the age of 12. However, boys showing promise could go on with formal education in Greek and Latin literature. Another important subject was the art of rhetoric. Those pursuing this higher education were also exposed to earlier Greek philosophers.

As for clothing, the toga for men and the palla for women was a standard, and statutory dress for a Roman citizen. There was little difference in footwear between men and women. The standard was for men to stay cleanly shaven and so barber shops were a regular part of urban life. Women generally wore their hair up in a variety of styles.

Corn and wheat were the food staples, along with fruit, cheese, and vegetables. Meat was less common but was served. The rich dined a bit more extravagantly. *Jentaculum* was a light morning meal, *prandium*, a mid-morning lunch, and *cena*, the main meal, was eaten in the middle of the day. For the rich the dinner meal was often an all evening affair and eating in excess was encouraged. Wine was considered the national drink with beer considered a less civilized taste.

Not only did the Romans work shorter days, they also had relatively fewer work days and more holidays than the modern standard. During the reign of Claudius there were 159 days listed as public holidays. These days were often religious in nature. Under the republic, the religious nature of the holiday was substituted by secular games to commemorate events. These included *ludi scaenici* (theatrical events), and *ludi circenses* (race track style events). The *ludi circenses* were home to the very popular chariot races.

There was a darker side to some of these events which involved fights to the death by teams of slave gladiators and condemned criminals. Christians were also considered 'good sport'. Fights and killings of wild animals were also common. To celebrate the opening of the Colosseum in 80. A.D., 5000 wild animals and 4,000 domesticated animals were killed. Another form of combat was the sea-fight or *naumacia*, in which fleets of oarmen were pitted against each other.

Art, Architecture, and Building

Overall Roman art and architecture is characterized by opulence and permanence. The most common material was stone. Sculptures, paintings, and architecture were all designed to give distinction to their culture. The arch and dome were prevalent shapes found in many larger public buildings and their influence is still seen today, especially in public building architecture.

Roman sculpture was to honor gods, goddesses and dead ancestors. In contrast to Greek sculpture which was relatively emotionless, Roman sculpture used detailed carving for added expression. Sculpture was also used to record important events on pillars, arches, and tombs.

Paintings and mosaics were the most common decoration inside homes. Some homes even used a primitive heating system with hot air pumped into the spaces of walls. The wealthy generally had two houses, a villa in the country, and a villa urbana in the city.

The primary government buildings were distinguished by extensive use of the arch and dome, as mentioned above. Other types of public buildings included bathhouses, theaters, and temples. They also built an extensive system of aqueducts. The engineering of the aqueducts is still today a good reminder of the technical expertise of the Romans brought to their art, architecture, and public works.

Latin Literature

The first people to inhabit the Italian peninsula spoke three languages, Oscan, Umbrian, and Latin. Latin military expansion caused Latin to become the dominant language. Latin is distinguished by its use of inflections and flexible sentence order.

In poetry, alliteration was used widely, but rhymes only rarely. Poetry was also written in metric patterns of long and short syllables. One popular metric form as used by Vergil and Juvenal is hexameter (six feet per line with one accented and one unaccented syllable per foot) which was applied rigidly.

Quintus Ennius is thought to be thought the father of Latin poetry. He wrote many plays, comedies, and tragedies, as well as poetry. His most important work is his history of Rome up to his own day.

Comedy was also an important genre and two of its masters were Plautus and Terrence. Comedy was characterized by stereotypical characters in situations such as mistaken identity and young love. Plautus adapted Greek verse to Latin. He improved on the Greek model by replacing crude banter with clever situations. His plays have served as models for future playwrights such as Shakespeare. Terrence invented the comedy of manners. He used double plots to keep his plays lively. His work influenced French dramatists such as Diderot and Moliere.

Lucretius was a staunch follower of the Greek Epicurean movement. He wrote an unprecedented philosophical poem called *De Rerum Natura*. In this poem he addresses nature, matter, space, and the mind.

Lyric poetry, originally popular with the Greeks meant poetry or song that was accompanied by the lyre. The Romans adopted the self-expressive nature of lyric poetry without necessarily using lyres. The lyric poet Catullus wrote piercingly observant poems about his friends and enemies. He also wrote poems about his love-hate relationship with Lesbia which influenced Shakespeare's own sonnets about the dark lady.

Horace was Catullus' successor. He wrote four books of lyric poetry on political and satirical themes.

Virgil wrote *The Aeneid*, the epic poem of Roman nationalism. His first major work was the *Eclogues*, a series of bucolic stories. He next wrote four technical books about farming called *The Georgics*. After that he wrote the *The Aeneid* when he was commissioned by Octavian. *The Aeneid* continued the story of *The Iliad* to emphasize the connection between Rome and the heroes of Troy. Virgil had a profound influence on poets such as Chaucer, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Keats, and Tennyson.

One elegiac poet was Propertius. He published his first book of elegies in 26. B.C. Most of his poems are about his love for Cynthia. Ovid was another elegiac poet. His early poems, *Amores*, and *Ars Amatoria* were about pleasure and love and controversial in so much as they condoned adultery. His most famous work, *The Metamorphoses* linked myths and legends and were drawn widely upon by later European writers.

Martial and Juvenal, writing around 100 A.D. were the primary writers of epigrams and satires. Martial was considered a witty but coarse poet who wrote verse for anyone and any occasion. He influenced his friend Juvenal. At one point Juvenal was exiled to Egypt for writing offensive verse. Between 110-130 A.D. he wrote 16 satires attacking homosexuals, living conditions, women, extravagance, and vanity.

Two important novelists were Petronius and Apuleius. The novels of the Romans were a combination of prose fiction and satire.

As far as Histories, Nulius Caesar wrote the earliest surviving first hand accounts in his *Del Bello Gallico*. Another historian was Livy who wrote a whole history of Rome in 142 books. His narratives had a popular bent. Tacitus wrote two histories covering the reigns of Tiberius and Domitian as well as Germania, about the culture to the north.

Philosophy and Science were advanced by Seneca and Pliny the Elder. Seneca's philosophy was introduced by the Stoics and he was a moral philosopher who aimed to live correctly through exercising his reason. Pliny the Elder concerned himself with natural phenomenon. He wrote about physics, geography, and physiology. When Mount Vesuvius erupted he wanted to get closer to observe and in doing so was killed probably by asphyxiation.

Cicero and Pliny the younger are probably the most noteworthy letter writers. Cicero's letters were undoubtedly intended as public documents and commentaries on Roman political life. Pliny the Younger was a distinguished orator and public servant.