

Teachers Notes

Rome Part One

From Village to Late Republic

753 – 121 BC

by Paul Latham

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Early Rome to the beginnings of the Late Republic in 121 BC

INTRODUCTION

While the Persians were expanding their empire in the Near East and the civilisation of Greece was at its peak, the Romans were driving out an Etruscan king. In 509 BC Rome established a republic in Italy. Rome began an experiment in governance that would last almost 400 years. It became an aristocratic republic, guided by elected representatives of its most powerful families. By 168 BC Rome was the capital of an empire greater in size and power than anything before it

Italy is a long peninsula and has a mountainous landscape. The backbone running through the middle of the country is called the Apennines. The Plain of Latium with the Tiber River running through it was on the site where the city of Rome was founded. The Seven Hills of Rome provided a natural fortress for the city.

Much of our information concerning the stories, legends and history of early Rome is obtained from sources such as Livy, who wrote many centuries later, and from the work of archaeologists. According to the sources seven kings ruled Rome from 753 to 509 BC. Romulus after the death of his twin brother Remus, founded Rome in 753. He became its king and is believed to have created the Senate. His successor Numa Pompilius created the priesthoods and religious institutions, as well as giving Rome a calendar. Tullus Hostilius his successor erected the Curia where the Senate met. The fourth king Ancus Marcius was followed by three Etruscan kings, whose reigns brought Rome prosperity and the construction of temples to Jupiter, Juno and Minerva, the patron deities of the city. The despotic third Etruscan king Tarquin, provoked a rebellion and he was overthrown in 509 BC.

Understanding the issues

1. Explanation of terms: Etruscan; Curia; Senate; archaeologists; Jupiter; Juno; Minerva
2. Map Study: On a blank map of the Italian Peninsula mark in the Apennines, the Tiber River, the Arno River, Latium, Rome, Campania, Tyrrhenian Sea, Adriatic Sea
3. Research the legend of Remus and Romulus and their contribution to the founding of Rome
4. Discuss the role played by ancient writers, historians and archaeologists to our knowledge of ancient Rome
5. Film Study: What does the film reveal about role and impact of the Etruscan kings?

POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC

The Romans developed a well structured political system during the first part of the early republic. After the tyrannical Tarquin was driven out, the Romans safeguarded their rights from future tyranny by naming two consuls to serve concurrently. The Senate, the assemblies of citizens and the elected and appointed magistrates governed Rome.

Roman society was divided into patricians and plebeians. Patricians were the large landowners and the heads of patrician families sat in an advisory body the Senate.

Plebeians were independent farmers, artists, merchants and clients of patricians. Over time the plebeians continued to gain concessions

The Senate consisted of 300 elder statesmen from the nobility. The members were appointed for life by the consuls from a list of qualified candidates drawn up by the censors. They had administrative power and certain legislative and judicial rights. The Senate being a continuous body tended to keep the government fairly stable.

The Assembly of Centuries or *Comitia Centuriata* was a military-political group dating back to Etruscan times. Citizens were organised according to military status. As the majority of the centuries belonged to the upper classes, this group controlled the Assembly.

The Assembly of Tribes or the *Comitia Tributa* was a democratic assembly where plebeians were elected as tribunes. The tribunes could veto an act of any magistrate and presided over the *Tributa*. As the plebeians gained more power, the powers of this assembly grew correspondingly.

Magistrates were elected and appointed to govern Rome. Two Consuls were appointed to serve concurrently. These two equal executives, elected annually, had the roles of chief executive and army commander. They were given the powers of *imperium* and *auspicium*. Each consul could veto the acts of the other. They presided over the Senate and *Centuriata*. In times of need the consuls would nominate and the Senate confirm, the appointment of a dictator, who was given absolute power but with a tenure limited to six months. The *praetors* or judges were important in the formulation of Roman law. Censors were also elected and registered all people according to wealth. They let government contracts and nominated senators. Other officials included *aediles* or commissioners of public works and welfare, and *quaestors* or treasurers.

Understanding the issues

1. Explanation of terms: *Imperium*, *auspicium*, patricians, plebeians, *cursus honorum*
2. Research: The significance and impact of the Law of the Twelve Tables
3. Debate: The political structure of our society owes much to the Romans.
4. How would the Romans vote for magistrates? Organise an election for officials and the system of recording votes
5. Discussion: How effectively could the Roman political system stop an individual seizing absolute power?
6. How does the film enhance your understanding of the political system in the new republic?

RELIGION AND EVERYDAY LIFE IN ROME

At home or in the street, in private or in public, Romans were always in the presence of the gods. They worshipped them at regular hours in the many shrines and temples in Rome, but also devoted time to them in the intimacy of their own homes. The household gods were called the *lares* and *penates* and most households had a small shrine or *lararium*.

The Romans worshipped many gods and goddesses, as they believed that everything that happened was a result of divine intervention. The Romans celebrated many festivals in honour of the gods.

The Romans adopted gods from many countries. Osiris and Isis were gods adopted from Egypt. The expansion of the empire introduced many gods to the Romans. However the more important gods were those adapted from the Greek gods such as Jupiter the king god, Juno the chief goddess, Minerva the goddess of wisdom and the arts, Mercury the messenger of the gods, Mars the god of war, Venus the goddess of love, Janus the two faced god of doors and boundaries, Vesta the goddess of the hearth, Neptune the god of the seas and Apollo the god of the sun. The Romans were also extremely superstitious and believed in spirits and omens.

Romans worshipped in temples dedicated to special gods. All religious ceremonies were conducted by priests or priestesses who were elected state officials. The chief priest was called the *Pontifex Maximus* and was elected for life by the *Pontiffs*. He controlled the priests associated with the numerous Roman gods as well as the Vestal Virgins, six priestesses whose duty was to guard the sacred flame of Rome. There were also *Augers*, who were priests appointed specially to the position. No important public act could be carried out unless the *augers* declared that the auspices were favourable.

The majority of the population of Rome lived in squalor in crowded tenements, up to five storeys high. Shops occupied the ground floor where people could buy food and drink, or they could trade goods. There was no water supply and there was always fire danger, or fear of buildings collapsing. Streets were paved but unlit and narrow, with a drainage channel and stepping stones to cross the road. The inhabitants obtained water from public wells and used public toilets where they sat side by side on stone benches. Water was brought to the city by aqueducts. Houses belonging to the wealthy had many rooms including bedrooms, a dining room and sometimes an atrium. They were well decorated and had ample furnishings. Some had lead pipes that brought water to the household. Lighting was obtained by burning oil in lamps. Roman houses did not have bathrooms so Romans where possible went to the local baths, where there were rooms and pools at different temperatures. The baths were also a place for exercise, business, eating and meeting people.

Romans enjoyed their leisure time. Banquets were a popular activity for the wealthy. All Romans enjoyed the feasting and games associated with the many festivals celebrated in honour of the gods. Romans also enjoyed plays, both tragedies and comedies. Taverns and inns were popular, particularly with the poorer classes.

Understanding the issues

1. Explanation of terms: *Lares*; *penates*; *lararium*; Osiris; Isis; *Pontifex Maximus*; *augers*; auspices; atrium
2. List the Roman gods and their corresponding Greek equivalents
3. Plan a Roman banquet, using the food of that time
4. Discuss the contribution of adopted gods to Roman religion
5. Research: The role of women in Roman society.

6. Film study: What does the film reveal about life in Rome at this time and the difference in lifestyle between wealthy Romans and those who lived in the tenements?

ROMAN ARCHITECTURE AND ENGINEERING

The Romans were great architects, engineers and builders and introduced many innovations in buildings. Since the third century Rome's builders had been erecting high rise timber framed apartment buildings to house the city's growing population. These buildings were sometimes up to five storeys high. The walls around Rome were rebuilt in 378 BC. There was also a program of temple building in Rome from 302-272 BC

The Romans were skilled in road building. They realised that good paved roads were essential in controlling the empire, enabling troops to be moved easily and messages to be sent. The great Roman achievement was in the construction of straight, paved roads over bridges and viaducts and through cuttings and tunnels. In 312 BC the censor Appius Claudius Caecus began the construction of the coast road from Rome to Capua, which bears his name the Appian Way. This was extended to Venusia around 285 BC. It was later extended to Brundisium on the Adriatic Coast. Many roads were constructed in the two centuries after 312 BC that helped link Rome with its provinces. Army engineers supervised the work of road building using skilled craftsmen. Stones called milestones were erected alongside the roadside every thousand paces.

The Forum had emerged as a market place and meeting place, in its current location around the seventh century. Over the years as Rome's status as a great power grew, public buildings displayed an expression of that imperial might, becoming larger with grander decorative features. Although the embracing colonnades and decorative features reflected Greek influence, public buildings in Rome had their own stylistic differences. The Romans built their temples on raised platforms in the Etruscan style. Temples were built in the fifth century to Saturn, Ceres, Castor and Apollo. While the Greek temples appeared similar from the sides, the front of Roman temples had a deep columned porch. Building on earlier Greek designs, the Romans began to enclose space in great sweeping curves. For purposes of public entertainment they created bowls and oval shapes such as the Circus Flaminius built in 221 BC. They also built vaulted baths and basilicas, such as the Basilica Porcia built in the Roman Forum in 184 and the Basilica Aemilia built in 179. Rounded tombs, colonnaded arched recesses and domed rotundas were also constructed. All this would not have been possible without the evolution of the arch and the invention of concrete. The arch became a feature of Roman architecture and can be seen today in the remains of aqueducts, bridges, colonnades, porticoes and monumental arches of triumph throughout Rome and its empire. The Temple of Fortuna at Praeneste dating probably from the last part of the second century is regarded as more impressive than any contemporary structure in Rome and was modelled on Hellenistic sanctuaries.

Understanding the issues

1. Explanation of terms: Colonnades, forum, basilicas, aqueducts, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian

2. On a map of Italy, mark the location of Via Appia (Appian Way); Via Annia, Via Clodia; Via Aurelia Vetus; Via Cassia; Via Flaminia. What other can roads can you find that were constructed in this period?
3. Research: Name and describe the features of some of the temples, basilicas and aqueducts in the period to the beginning of the Late Republic
4. Discussion: Does Roman architecture have a distinct style or is it an imitation of Etruscan and Greek styles?
5. Film Study: In what way does a study of public buildings and roads support the proposition that Rome was a great power?

THE ROMAN ARMY AND THE PUNIC WARS TO 146 BC

The Roman army was critical for the expansion and defence of the Roman Empire. Legionaries were the backbone of the Roman army. Soldiers were expected to be able to travel more than 30 kilometres carrying equipment weighing around 30 kilograms. They were equipped for fighting with body armour, a helmet, a shield made of metal and wood, a *gladius* or short sword and two throwing spears. Soldiers would join for 20 years, were well trained in weapons and warfare, and were harshly punished for breaches of discipline. One Roman tactic was the *testudo*, where the outside legionaries held their shields together, while the others in the square raised and interlocked the shields to protect their heads. The armies were divided into legions. The Romans also used recruits from their provinces, known as auxiliaries. Cavalry was also used. Roman soldiers were also trained as engineers, enabling them to build siege weapons such as battering rams, catapults, slingshots, ballistas and siege towers.

In the Early Republic, Rome fought off invasion by the Etruscans in 493 BC and by the Celts, who sacked the city in 39 BC. Members of the Latin League took advantage of this invasion, withdrew from the League and made war on Rome. However they were defeated by the Romans, their League dissolved, and forced to become allies. With armies built up by recruits from their allies, Rome then subdued the Etruscans and the Celts, the highland Samnites and the Greek colonies of southern Italy and Sicily

Rome in controlling the foreign affairs of her expanding possessions and allies, found herself involved in ever increasing border disputes. After 270 her two rivals in the Mediterranean were the Carthaginian Empire and the Greek cities outside Magna Graecia, under the leadership of Syracuse. Rome was involved in numerous wars between 264 BC and 146 BC. Rome was the master of Italy as the first of the Punic Wars began in 264 BC. Control of the Mediterranean by the Carthaginians compelled Rome to build a navy of 100 ships. Although they suffered early losses in sea battles, the Romans eventually triumphed. In 241 BC they seized control of Sicily from Carthage. In the Gallic Wars of 225-222 BC the Romans defeated the Gauls and annexed the fertile Po Valley. In the Second Punic War which began in 218 BC, the Roman army under Publius Cornelius Scipio defeated the Carthaginian general Hannibal at Zama in 202 BC. At the end of the Third Punic War in 146 BC, the Romans under Scipio Aemilianus defeated the Carthaginians, razed the city of Carthage and made the territory of Carthage a Roman province.

Rome also turned eastward, defeating first Syria then Macedonia. By 146 BC Rome controlled a large part of the territory bordering on the Mediterranean from the Aegean Sea to the Atlantic Ocean. Nationalism became a potent force during the foreign wars and greatly influenced the political, social and cultural life of the Romans.

Understanding the issues

1. Explanation of terms: Magna Graecia, Punic, corvus, testudo; gladius; legion; cohort; century; centurion; ballistas
2. Explain why the Roman army was so successful during this period. Examine such aspects as recruitment, training, organisation, weapons and tactics
3. Research: The hardships and problems faced by Hannibal's army in crossing the Alps.
4. Debate: That Rome was an imperialistic power
5. Discussion: Why is the Battle of Cannae regarded as one of the worst defeats the Roman army ever suffered? What were the reasons for this defeat?
6. Film study: What do we learn from the film about Roman warfare and the expansion of the empire?

THE DEMOCRATIC REFORMERS AND THE DEMISE OF THE REPUBLIC

Now in control of the Mediterranean, Rome dominated Spain, North Africa and the Near East. The spoils of war brought prosperity but also internal upheaval. The dominant body in the second century was the Senate. Its followers were called the *Optimates*. The opponents of the *Optimates* were the *Populares* and the *Equites*. The struggles of these groups lasted for a century. A popular movement for land reform led first by Tiberius Gracchus in 133 BC until his murder and then by his brother Gaius Gracchus, was put down by the upper class. Power shifted to the army. A series of strong generals transformed Rome into a dictatorship. The first, Gaius Marius, was elected consul seven times, and his reforms made the army a professional and well disciplined force. He was discredited after running for consul in 100 BC and disappeared from political prominence.