

Ancient Rome

Directions: Read the following article on the Ancient Rome. Answer the questions which follow in one or more complete sentences that restate the question. Then construct a timeline from what you have read. You should find ten events within the text for your timeline.

The origins of Rome are hidden in the mists of myth and legend. For the Romans, the origins of their city revolve around twin brothers, Romulus and Remus. They were sons of the Roman god of war, Mars, or so the ancient scholars claimed. Their mother abandoned the twins in the hills around the Tiber River to hide them from their uncle, who wanted to kill them. A she-wolf saved the babies, suckling them as her own pups. Later rescued, they grew up to be fierce warriors.

The myth states that Romulus and Remus founded Rome in 753 BC. But they fought, unable to agree where the city should be built. Romulus killed his brother in a fit of rage, ending the dispute. As a result, he got his way and the city was built on the top of Palatine Hill. Romulus became the first king of a brutal and warlike people. Upon his death, the Romans believed Mars carried the king off in a thundercloud to become a god.

Myth and legends aside, Rome was originally ruled by kings. The aristocrats (i.e., rich men) of Rome disliked them. These kings shared too little of their power with the rich, ruling the city with cruel and unjust hands. Being wealthy, the aristocrats felt they had a right to have a say in their government. As a result, the aristocrats decided to rebel.

The last of these kings was called Tarquin the Proud. A powerful ruler, the aristocrats knew they could not oust him on their own. So, they went to the poor people of Rome. They promised to share power with the poor if they helped the aristocrats overthrow his rule. The poor helped, but the aristocrats did not keep their word.

In 509 BC, the aristocrats created the Roman Republic after they had ousted Tarquin the Proud. Initially, this government was an oligarchy, in which a small group of rich men ruled Rome. This small group of men was

called the Senate, and they shared no power with the poor.

As a result “The Mob,” as the aristocrats mockingly called the poor, rebelled. They forced the aristocrats to give them a say in government. They elected the senators (who still had to be aristocrats). They also elected tribunes from their own ranks. These men had the power to veto (that is, forbid) any law the Senate passed which they thought might hurt the poor.

For hundreds of years, the Romans gained power in Europe. First, they brought all of the cities of the Italian boot under their control. Later, they conquered Carthage in the Punic Wars. This brought the lands of Spain and North Africa under their sway. In time, they struck eastward to conquer Greece and Palestine. They also struck west to conquer Gaul (in modern-day France) and Britain.

Many civil wars erupted between the tribunes, aristocrats, and ambitious generals for control of Rome. Eventually, a general by the name of Julius Caesar emerged as the clear-cut winner. He declared himself dictator for life, claiming absolute power over Rome. For the senators of the Roman Republic, this was too much. They did not like the idea of losing their power to one man. So, in 44 BC, they stabbed him to death on the Senate floor.

His death touched off yet another civil war. Octavian, Caesar’s nephew and adopted son, challenged two other contenders for control of Rome. The first was Lepidus, an aristocrat, who offered Octavian little trouble. The second was Mark Anthony, who allied himself with the Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt. After a series of battles, he got the better of this famous couple, forcing them to commit suicide. His victory secured Egypt for Rome.

In 27 BC, Octavian took absolute power over Rome and her empire. He did not dissolve the Senate, nor did he call himself dictator as Julius Caesar had. He called himself “First Citizen” and declared himself tribune. This allowed him to overrule any decisions of the Senate he did not like. This gave him complete control over the government, but did not upset the aristocrats. He took the name Caesar

Augustus, a title which proclaimed him a god on earth.

Caesar Augustus's reign lasted for over forty years. It was a time of peace and stability throughout the Empire. Into this world Jesus Christ of Nazareth was born in the Roman province of Judea in AD 1. In time, he became the leader of religious movement there. Fearing he might stir up trouble against them, the Romans had him executed when he was in his thirties. His followers spread his teachings throughout the Empire.

Many emperors followed Augustus. Some, like Caligula and Nero, were mad. Caligula tried to appoint his favorite horse to an important post in government. Soon after, he fell to the blade of an assassin. It is said Nero set fire to Rome to clear the way for a magnificent palace for himself. He blamed the fire on the Christians, but "the Mob" hated Nero's palace as a revolting display of selfishness. They rose up and overthrew him, after which he killed himself.

Others, however, were extremely competent leaders. Vespasian was well aware that the poor people of Rome needed to be appeased after Nero's fiasco. He began building a gift for them, the Coliseum. It was a massive stadium that could hold 80,000 spectators. When it was finished in AD 80, it opened its doors with 100 days of games. In that time period alone, 5,000 animals died in fights with gladiators. The people of Rome loved the violence and loved their emperors for it.

The Roman elite used the games to keep the people of their empire happy. To pay for them, the emperors often turned to the Roman legions to float the bill. Trajan, for example, sent his legions to attack the kingdom of Dacia. After five years of war, the Romans completed their conquest of this land in AD 106. They hauled away the treasures of Dacia and drove much of its population into slavery. This enriched the coffers of the Roman Empire, keeping its masses well entertained.

After Trajan, the emperors of Rome chose to simply hold on to what their forbearers had won rather than expand into other lands. From that point forward, barbarian tribes hammered against the gates of the Roman Empire. The emperors pushed back, rushing legions here and there to evict the barbarians from Roman lands. When

Diocletian took power, he decided that the problem of defending the empire against barbarian attack was too complex for one man to solve alone. So, he divided his lands into two parts in AD 286—the Western Roman Empire and the Eastern Roman Empire. The western half was ruled from Rome, and the eastern half was ruled from the Greek city of Constantinople.

All during this time, the Christian religion grew in size and influence. From the time of Christ's death, the Romans tried to stamp out the Christian religion by torturing and executing its followers. By the 4th Century AD, however, so many people had become Christian in the empire that the emperors became Christian themselves. The first of these was Constantine the Great. Finally in AD 380 Theodosius I made Christianity the state religion of the Roman Empire. As a result, everyone throughout the Empire had to become Christian.

The division of the Roman Empire into western and eastern halves had unforeseen consequences. The western half was the poorer of the two halves. As a result, it had fewer resources to defend itself with. As a result, wave after wave of barbarian invasion washed through the Western Empire. City after city fell, and the barbarians settled in the provinces. In the end, Rome herself was conquered by the barbarian king Odoacer. This ended the reign of the Romulus Augustus, the last emperor of Rome, in AD 476.

- 1. What rescued Romulus and Remus?**
- 2. Where did Romulus have Rome built?**
- 3. Why did the aristocrats of Rome rebel against their kings?**
- 4. Who was the last king of Rome?**
- 5. What government did the aristocrats create replace the kings?**
- 6. What did the Mob do when the aristocrats refused to share power?**
- 7. What lands did Rome take from Carthage?**
- 8. Why did the senators murder Julius Caesar?**
- 9. What happened to Cleopatra?**
- 10. What did the title "Augustus" mean?**
- 11. Why did the Romans execute Jesus?**
- 12. Why did the Mob overthrow Nero?**
- 13. How big was the Coliseum?**
- 14. What kingdom did Trajan conquer?**
- 15. Why did Diocletian split the Empire?**
- 16. Who was the last Roman Emperor?**