Rome and the Roman Empire

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# Rome

The accounts of the regal period have come down overlaid with such a mass of myth and legend that few statements can be accepted as factual; the Roman historians of later times, lacking authentic records, relied on fabrications of a patriotic records, relied on fabrications of a patriotic fancy.

**The Legendary Period of the kings(753-510 BC)**

Rome was said to have been founded by Latin colonists from Alba Longa, a nearby city in ancient Latium. The legendary date of the founding was 753 BC; it was ascribed to Romulus and Remus, the twin sons of Rhea Silvia, a vestal virgin and the daughter of Numitor, king of Alba Longa. Later legend carried the ancestry of the Romans back to the Trojans and their leader Aeneas, whose son Ascanius, or lulus, was the founder and the first king of Alba Longa. The tales concerning Romulus’s rule, notably the rape of the Sabine women and the war with the Sabines under the leader Titus Tatius, point to an early infiltration of Sabine peoples or to a union of Latin and Sabine elements at the beginning. The three tribes, the Ramnes, Titieus, and Luceres, that appear in the legend of Romulus as the parts of the new commonwealth suggest that Rome arose from the amalgamation of three stocks, thought to be Latin, Sabine, and Etruscan.

The seven kings of the regal period and the dates traditionally assigned to their regns are as follows: Romulus, from 753 to 715 BC; Numa Pompilius, from 715 to 676 or 672 BC, to whom was attributed the introduction of many religious customs; Tullus Hostilius, from 673 to 641 BC, a warlike king, who destroyed Alba Longa and fought against the Sabines; Ancus Marcius, from 641 to 616 BC, said to have built the port of Astia and to have captured many Latin towns, transferring their inhabitants to Rome; Lucius Tarquinius Priscus, from 616 to 578 BC, celebrated both for his military exploits against neighboring peoples and for his construction of public buildings at Rome; Servius Tullius, from 578 to 534 BC, famed for his new constitution and for the enlargement of the boundaries of the city; and Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, from 534 to 510 BC, the seventh and the last king, whose tyrannical rule was overthrow when his son ravished Lucretia, the wife of a kinsman. Tarquinius was banished, and attempts by Etruscan or Latin cities to reinstate him on the throne at Rome were unavailing.

Although the names, dates, and events of the regal period are considered as belonging to the regal of fiction and myth rather than to that of factual history, certain facts seem well attested: the existence of an early rule by kings; the growth of the city and its struggles with neighboring peoples; the conquest of Rome by Etruria and the establishment of a dynasty of Etruscan princes, symbolized by the rule of the Tarquins; the overthrow of this alien control; and the abolition of the kingship. The existence of certain social and political conditions may also be accepted, such as the division of the beginning into two orders: the patricians, who alone possessed political rights and constituted the populus, or people; and their dependents, known as clients or the plebs, who had originally no political existence. The rex, or king, chosen by the Senate(senatus), or Council of Elders, from the ranks of the patricians, held office for life, called out the populus for war, and led the army in person; he was preceded by officers, known as lictors, who bore the faces, the symbols of power and punishment, and was the supreme judge in all civil and criminal suits. The senatus gave its advice only when the king chose to consult it, but the elders(patres) possessed great moral authority, inasmuch as their tenure was for life. Originally only patricians could bear arms in defense of the state. At some stage in the regal period an important military reform occurred, usually designated as the Servian reform of the constitution, because it was decided that all property and wealth, it was ascribed to Servius Tullius. As the plebs could by this time acquire property and wealth, it was decided that all property holders, both patrician and plebian, must serve in army, and each took a rank in accordance with his wealth. This arrangement, although initially military, paved the way for the great political struggle between the patricians and the plebs in the early centuries of the Republic.

## The Republic

On the overthrow of Tarquininus Superbus a republic was established.

**Conquest of Italy(510-264 BC)**

In place of the king, two chief executives were chosen annually by the whole body of citizens. These were known as praetors, or leaders, but later received the title of consuls. The participation of a colleague in the exercise of supreme power and the limitation of the tenure to one year prevented the chief magistrate from becoming autocratic. The character of the Senate was altered by the enrollment of plebeian members, known as conscreipti, and hence the official designation of the senators thereafter was patres conscripti(conscript fathers). As yet, only patricians were aligible for the magistracies, and the discontent of the plebs led to a violent struggle between the two orders and the gradual removal of the social and political disabilities under which the plebs had labored.

In 494 BC a secession of plebian soldiers led to the institution of the tribuni plebis, who were elected annually as protectors of the plebs; they had the power to veto the acts of patrician magistrates, and thus served as the leaders of the plebs in the struggles with the patricians. The appointment of the decemvirate, a commission of a famous code of laws. In 445 BC, under the Canuleian law, marriages between patricians and members of the plebs were declared legally valid. By the Licinian-Sextian laws, passed in 367 BC, it was provided that one of the two consuls should thenceforth be plebeian. The other magistracies were gradually apened to the plebs: in 356 BC, the dictatorship, an extraordinary magistracy, the incumbent of which was appointed in times of great danger; in 350 BC, the censorship; in 337 BC, the praetorship; and in 300 BC, the pontifical and augural colleges.

**A World Power(264-133 BC)**

In 264 BC, 11 years after the victory over Pyrrhus, Rome engaged with Carthage in a struggle for the control of the Mediterranean Sea. Carthage at this time was the foremost maritime power in the world, ruling as absolutely in the central and western Mediterranean as did Rome on the Italian Peninsula.

## The Empire

Ceasar’s assassination by Republican nobles on March 15, 44 BC, was followed by Cicero’s attempt to restore the old Republican constitution, but Mark Antony, who had been appointed consul with Marcus Aemilius Lepidus and Caesar’s grandnephew, the youthful Octavian, later Rmperor Augustus, to form the second triumvirate.

Octavian received the title of Augustus in 27 BC and began the new regime by an apparent restoration of the Republic, with himself as princeps, or chief citizen.

During the last 80 years of the Western Roman Empire the provinces, drained by taxes levied for the support of the army and the bureacracy, were visited by internal war and by barbarian invasions. At first the policy of conciliating the invader with military commands and administrative offices succeded. Gradually, however, the barbarians estublished in the east began to aim at conquest in the west, and Alaric I, king of the Visigoths, first occupied illyricum, whence he ravaged Greece. In 410 he captured and sacked Rome, but died soon after. His successor, Ataulf(r. 410-15), drew off the Visigoths to Gaul, and in 419 a succeeding king, Wallia, received formal permission from Honorius to settle in southwestern Gaul, where at Toulouse he founded the Visigothic dynasty.The last Western Roman emperor, Romulus Augustulus, was overthrown by the mercenary Herulian leader Odoacer(c.435-93),who was proclaimed king of Italy by his troops. The history of Rome would subsequently merge with that of the papacy, the Holy Roman Empire, the Papal States, and Italy. For the history of the Eastern Empire from the time of Theodosius the Great.