CHAPTER 4 - ROME: FROM REPUBLIC TO EMPIRE

CHAPTER SUMMARY

After describing Italy before the rise of Rome, the society of royal Rome, and the early republic and its constitution, this chapter tells the story of Rome's expansion: the conquest of Italy, the wars with Carthage, the increasing involvement with the Greek world, the eventual takeover of the Hellenistic east, and finally the decline of the republic amid political factions and civil war.

The culture of Italy developed later than those societies in the Near East. About 1000 B.C.E., Italy was overwhelmed by war-like invaders who cremated their dead, made iron tools and weapons, and spoke a number of related languages known as Italic.

Civilized Etruscans arrived in Tuscany (Etruria), perhaps from the east, about 800 B.C.E. and established themselves in a loose corporation of self-governing city-states. The Etruscans dominated the native Italians and accumulated considerable wealth. They expanded both to the north and south, but their conquests were not firmly based and were lost in the course of the fifth century B.C.E. Thereafter, Etruria lost its independence, but the Etruscan's influence on the Romans remained particularly in religion.

The chapter goes on to describe Roman society and government under the kings (753-509 B.C.E.). In essence, Rome was ruled by a king whose powers were limited by advisors, who composed the Senate, and an assembly of the people. The center of Roman life was the family, in which the father had a position analogous to that of the king in the state. One of Rome's most important institutions was clientage; a client entrusted himself to the protection of a more powerful man (called a patron) in exchange for services which included military and political support.

A revolution in 509 B.C.E. replaced the monarchy with the republic. A thorough recounting of the Roman constitution and magistrates follows. Early Roman society had a class distinction based upon birth: the patricians monopolized the positions of power and influence while the plebeians were barred from public office and from the priesthoods. Over the next two centuries they tried to achieve equality with the patricians. Their attempt was called the "struggle of the orders" and by 287 B.C.E., through legal means, the plebeians gained full access to the magistracies, as well as an important voice in the government. But still only a small group of leading families dominated the Senate and highest magistracies. Art & the West focuses on the importance of ancestors in demonstrating social status during the Roman Republic.

Rome's conquest of Italy took more than two centuries. In that time, she subdued the Etruscan city of Veii, her Latin neighbors, the Samnites and the Greek cities of southern Italy, which were aided by Pyrrhus, king of Epirus. Rome only suffered a serious setback once when the Gauls invaded the city in 396 B.C.E. The Romans dealt with conquered cities quite liberally, offering citizenship to some, potential citizenship to others and allied status to the rest.

Now Rome was face to face with Carthage, the great naval power of the western Mediterranean. Rome fought three major wars against Carthage from 264-241; 218-201; and 149-146 B.C.E. Roman resources and fortitude were taxed to the limit, especially in the Second Punic War against the great general Hannibal; but in the end, Carthage was completely destroyed. Rome's victory against Carthage and her success in the eastern Mediterranean against Macedonia and Antiochus III in Asia Minor from about 215-150 opened the way to Roman supervision of the entire Mediterranean region. Such was not an easy task. Greeks and Romans did not understand freedom in the same way. The Romans found themselves becoming more and more involved in the affairs of Greece and Asia. Anti-Roman factions in the Greek cities were punished severely.

Political contact with Greece had a great effect upon Roman culture. This can easily be traced in the development of Roman education. Traditionally, Roman fathers saw to the education of their sons and some (such as Cato the Elder) decried the Greek influence and the popularity of the grammaticus who taught Greek and Latin literature, dialectic, geometry, astronomy and music. Advanced study in rhetoric and philosophy opened the Roman conqueror to the older and wider culture of the Hellenistic world. The chapter then details the treatment of women and their education in Rome.

Whether intended or not, Rome's expansion brought with it power, wealth and responsibility. The Roman constitution which had been well adapted to the mastery of Italy would be severely tested by the need to govern an empire beyond the seas.

By the middle of the second century B.C.E., Rome faced a serious manpower problem: peasants were losing their land and many could no longer qualify for the army. A political threat was also developing, as patrons had less control over clients who fled their land. In 133 B.C.E. a young tribune from an aristocratic family, Tiberius Gracchus, attempted to solve these problems by proposing that public land be redistributed to the poor. The bill aroused great hostility and after untraditional and unprecedented, but not illegal, measures by Tiberius to pass the bill, he was murdered by a mob of senators and their clients. Nevertheless, his career brought a permanent change to Roman politics as he showed an alternative to the traditional aristocratic career: politicians could go directly to the people.

In 123 B.C.E. Tiberius' younger brother, Gaiaus, became tribune with a much broader platform of reforms, designed to appeal to a variety of groups. Of primary importance was his insistence that full Roman citizenship be offered to the Italian allies. This proposal failed and after he lost a bid for reelection, Gaiaus also was hunted down and
Roman Constitution: One of the great achievements of the Romans was their constitution. An unwritten collection of laws based upon tradition and precedent, it sanctioned a government dependent on two principles: annuality and collegiality. That is, more than one person held each office (with the exception of the dictatorship) and they held it generally for one year only. Each citizen was allowed to vote and did in a number of traditional assemblies. Intended to govern a city-state, the constitution was appended to meet the demands of imperial administration.

Struggle of the Orders: The period from 509 to 287 B.C.E. has been termed the "Struggle of the Orders" since the plebeians agitated for legal equality with the patricians. Gradually the plebeians, through tactics such as secession, won full legal, political and social equality with the patricians. This was achieved without bloodshed—a point which the Romans were proud of and which contrasted with the chaos and violence of the late republic.

Clientage: The client-patron relationship in Rome was very important, and domestic politics involved the workings of this relationship on many levels, whether it was among aristocrats or between aristocrats and the poor. The relationship was hereditary and sanctioned by religion and custom.

Roman Imperialism: A much debated point in Roman history concerns Roman intentions in the acquisition of its empire. Did Rome have a blueprint for empire and consciously follow a policy of aggressive imperialism? The answer is probably no, but once Rome became involved in a dispute (especially in the Greek east and often by invitation), she found it difficult to remain neutral with her own interests and even survival at stake. Within about 120 years, Rome had expanded from control of the Italian peninsula to mastery of the entire Mediterranean—a transformation which would present great problems for the state in the second and first centuries B.C.E.

The Reforms of the Gracchi: The reforms instituted by the Gracchi which included redistribution of public land, colonies, Italian citizenship, subsidized grain, etc., were not illegal and in some cases even had precedent. Yet it was their method, especially that of Tiberius, which aroused the hatred of the aristocracy. Many precedents for later actions proceeded from the Gracchan episode, including murder and violent intimidation sanctioned by a dubious enactment called the "Final Decree of the Senate." A major problem which was not solved during this period was the approval of Italian citizenship. In the end, Rome would fight the Social War (90-88 B.C.E.) and win, only to agree to full Italian citizenship anyway.
6. **The Reforms of Marius**: In addition to changes in formation and weaponry, Marius changed the composition of the army as well. He began using volunteers, mostly dispossessed farmers and proletarians, who looked upon military service as a way of obtaining guaranteed food, shelter, clothing and booty from victories. Most importantly, they expected a piece of land upon discharge. Rather than looking to the Senate to provide these benefits, they expected them from their commander as fulfillment of a patron-client compact. One of the main reasons the republic collapsed was because of private armies loyal to their generals and not to the state.

7. **The Reforms of Sulla**: These were enacted in the late 80s and were designed to reestablish the Senate as the ruling institution of Rome. They called for, among other things, restrictions upon the veto power of tribunes and a halt to any advance in career after holding that office. Then only people without ambition would hold the office and the republic would be preserved from the troublesome obstructions of such as the Gracchi or Livius Drusus the Younger. The reforms, however, were undone by 70 B.C.E., for the most part.

8. **The Assassination of Julius Caesar**: Caesar's murder by Brutus, Cassius and about 60 senators stemmed from ideologues who believed that they were ridding Rome of a tyrant and that after liberation, the republic would automatically be restored. Thus they made no plans to follow up their deed and even refused to kill Mark Antony. It is not certain if Caesar planned to become "king" of Rome although he held the title of dictator for life. It is certain, however, that he did not court the traditional aristocracy and even abused their dignity upon occasion. His heir, Octavian, would form a coalition of supporters and conservatives which proved successful in the long run.

**SUGGESTED FILMS**

*Ancient Rome*. Coronet. 11 min.

*The Etruscans*. Vedo Films. 16 min.

*Etruscan Tombs of Volterra (300-100 B.C.E.)*. Time-Life. 11 min.

*Ancient Rome*. Coronet. 11 min.

*The Assassination of Julius Caesar*. McGraw-Hill. 27 min.

*Assassination of Julius Caesar*. Columbia Broadcasting System. 27 min.

*Julius Caesar: Rise of the Roman Empire*. Encyclopaedia Britannica Films. 22 min.

*Spirit of Rome*. Encyclopaedia Britannica. 29 min.