Chapter 3

Early Rome

1. THE WARLIKE MEDITERRANEAN

Romans lived in a dangerous neighborhood. The whole of Italy was an anarchic world of contending tribes, independent cities, leagues of cities, and federations of pre-state tribes. The Mediterranean world beyond Italy was not much different. During the period of Rome's emergence (ca. 500–300 B.C.) the Persian Empire consolidated its hold on the Middle East and the eastern Mediterranean, including parts of the Greek inhabited world, and for two centuries independent Greek city-states and Persians confronted each other, sometimes belligerently, and sometimes as allies. Simultaneously, individual Greek city states waged wars with each other as did alliances of Greek states among themselves. Wars lasted for generations. The great Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta and their allies raged in two phases from 460 to 446 B.C. and from 431 to 404 B.C. Sixty-five years later, Macedonians subdued the squabbling city states of Greece, bringing a kind of order to that war-torn land. Four years after defeating the Greeks, the Macedonians under Alexander the Great went on to conquer the Persian Empire. Their power reached from the Aegean to Afghanistan and India, but not for long as a unified state. After Alexander's death his successors quarreled and fought each other to a standstill.

While these wars were going on in the eastern Mediterranean the Phoenician colony of Carthage emerged as a belligerent, imperialistic power in the western Mediterranean. Just a three- or four-day sail from Rome, Carthage was potentially a much more dangerous than any power in Italy. It was no wonder that Virgil in the *Aeneid* found the origins of the two cities' antagonism in the mythical past. The Trojan hero Aeneas, destined by fate to found Rome, stopped off at Carthage, where he jilted Dido, the queen of Carthage, after a torrid love affair. He then left with his band of Trojan refugees to continue his wanderings. On her death pyre Dido swore revenge. Carthage first drove the Greeks out of most of the western

Mediterranean trading zone and then fought centuries-long campaigns against them in Sicily. They waged similarly aggressive wars against the native inhabitants of north Africa, the Berbers. During all of these momentous events occurring in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, Rome was struggling first merely for survival in central Italy and then for hegemony in the peninsula with its immediate neighbors.

Far away from the Mediterranean, continental Europe was probably even less settled and certainly as warlike, to judge from the hoards of weapons, armor and chariots that have been excavated and can be found in northern European museums in huge quantities today. Historically, we know of bands of Celtic warriors raiding and sometimes settling from Ireland in the west to what is today Turkey in the east. Fear of the Celts, *metus Gallicus*, was lodged deeply in Roman cultural perceptions and, as we will see, with good reason.

In short, Romans, wherever they looked—north, south, east, or west, on land or on sea—had no shortage of potential adversaries to snuff out, challenge, or at least restrain their growth. "All states are by nature fighting an undeclared war with all other states" said one of the speakers in Plato's dialogue the *Laws* (625e). A corollary of this assertion was that all states and tribes are forever prepared or preparing for war. A truer statement of the international situation in the Mediterranean might perhaps be, to paraphrase Plato that "some states are by nature fighting declared and undeclared wars with some, possibly many other states."

The irony was (and is) that the absence of organized states leads to anarchy, but so does the existence of organized states. The harsh world of interstate anarchy of the Mediterranean and European worlds fostered a culture of belligerence, militarism, and aggressive diplomacy among all parties. International law was minimal and, in any case, unenforceable. War "is a harsh instructor" said the Greek historian Thucydides who witnessed the Peloponnesian War at first hand (3.82). If the Romans were good at war it was, in part, because they had so many and such good instructors.

2. ROME'S LAKE: THE WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN

In ancient and modern times the western Mediterranean has been the focal point of the countries surrounding it. High mountain ranges and plateaus cut off the coastal areas from the interior and prevent easy communication with the land masses behind them, Long, narrow coastal plains in Africa and Spain lead up to high, arid mountains and plateaus. In Africa, the Atlas range and beyond it the vast waste of the Sahara constitute the southern boundary of the Mediterranean region and a major barrier to communication between this area and equatorial Africa even today. The rich agricultural plains of Italy—Tuscany, Lazio, and Campania—face the sea and are backed by the steeply rising peaks of the Apennines. The Cevennes and the Alps direct the inhabitants of the south of France away from continental Europe and toward the sea. Great rivers—the Ebro in Spain, the Rhône in France, and the Tiber in Italy—flow into the Mediterranean, drawing the peoples of the uplands toward the coasts, where the great cities—almost all of them founded in ancient times—are located. Conveniently situated islands—the Balear-

The Western Mediterranean: Rome's Lake

ics, Sardinia, Corsica, and Sicily—aid communication and in antiquity served as handy stopping places for the maritime, coast-hugging traffic. Distances are short in this world. In one of the more dramatic scenes from the Roman Republic, Cato the Elder (second century B.C.) was arguing in the Senate for the destruction of Carthage in Tunisia when he deliberately opened the folds of his toga and let fall a bunch of ripe figs that had been picked outside Carthage just three days before. The gesture drove home his point that a vigorous, warlike neighbor such as Carthage, even though in Africa, was much too close for comfort.

The Economy of the Western Mediterranean

The western Mediterranean was one of the richest mineral and agricultural areas in the ancient world. In Roman times, southeastern Spain, the Ebro valley, southern France, Italy from the Arno River to Salerno, and the hinterland of Carthage were covered with vineyards and olive groves. The export trade was brisk. Even today, the grid pattern of the Roman centuriated field system can be seen, especially from the air, stretching for mile after mile in the countryside of modern Tunisia. Grain from Sicily, Africa, and Sardinia fed Rome for centuries and allowed Italian farmers to concentrate on wine and oil production as well as on other cash crops.

It was the metals of the west, however, that first attracted the attention of the eastern civilizations. The Phoenicians were the first to stumble across the mineral wealth of Spain. In time its great potential was realized, and it became the Mediterranean world's principal source of silver, copper, lead and tin. Somewhat later the iron resources of Etruria began to be tapped. Ice core samples from Greenland for the period 600 B.C. to A.D. 700 show a huge spike in pollution between 300 B.C. and A.D. 300—essentially the Roman period—reaching a high point between 150
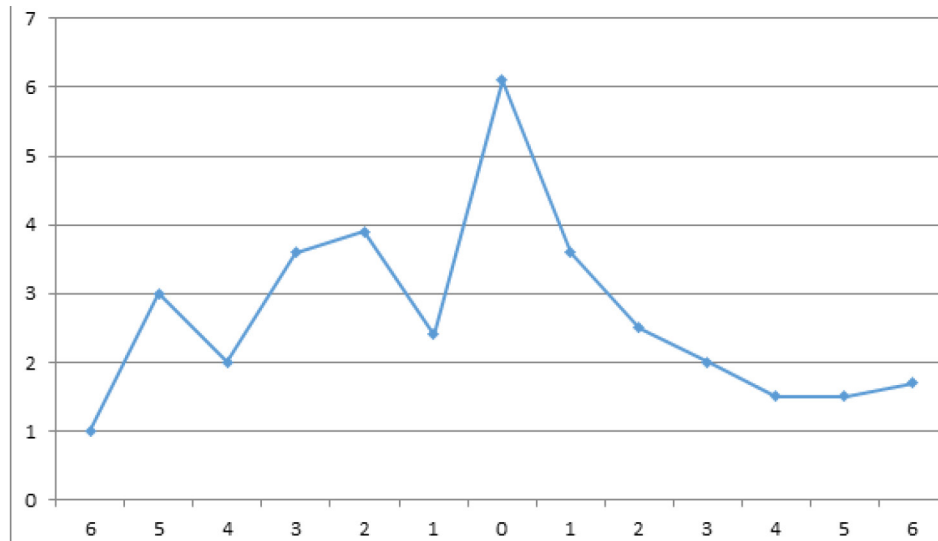

Figure 3–1 Concentration of lead (vertical axis, pg/g) in Greenland ice core from about 600 B.C. to A.D. 600 (horizontal axis).

B.C. and A.D. 50. It is estimated that 70 percent of the lead in the ice core samples came specifically from the Rio Tinto mines in southern Spain (see Figure 3.1). As the Greek civilization advanced, the Greeks also pursued the mineral wealth of the western Mediterranean. From the middle of the eighth century (ca. 750 B.C.), a flood of Greeks began moving across the northern rim of the western Mediterranean, paralleling the path of Phoenician traders who were moving primarily along the coast of Africa toward the Atlantic.

From at least the sixth century B.C., the area north of the Mediterranean, stretching from Spain through France, southern Germany and Austria, was occupied by warlike Celtic-speaking peoples. They resisted the Mediterranean impulse to form states or build cities much longer than the Greeks and Romans, and generally remained content with less complex forms of society, such as the chiefdom. Their presence and the presence of others like them—the Germanic peoples on and east of the Rhine, for instance—forever made the development of the state and of urban culture in the west a much slower and more precarious process than it had been among the Greeks and the peoples of Italy.

Italy: Geography and History

Italy is not a naturally unified land. It is a mosaic of different regions and subregions that throughout history have had difficulty communicating with each other. It lacks a large natural "center" the way, for instance, France and England have geographically coherent central homelands, or as Egypt or Mesopotamia had in antiquity. Symbolic of the way the ancients thought about Italy was the fact that for a good portion of their history Romans did not think of the Po valley (today Italy's most productive region) as part of Italy, and with good reason. The Po constituted what amounted to a separate country, being generally more in contact with continental Europe through the Brenner Pass than with peninsular Italy to the south, where the Apennines impeded communications. The names used by the Romans for these regions betray the way they thought about the north: The Po Valley was *Gallia Cisalpina*—that is, "Gaul-on-this-side-of-the-Alps." (Gaul proper or modern France was *Gallia Transalpina*—"Gaul-on-the-other side-of-the-Alps"). For them it was an alien land inhabited by barbarian Gauls (Gaels—or, as we know them more commonly, Celts). Vestiges of this sense of regional diversity persist to the present in the great northern Italian cities of Turin, Milan, Bologna and Venice. An active political movement currently seeks to detach northern Italy from the rest of the country, arguing that as the most developed and wealthiest part of Italy the north should not be forced to subsidize backward parts of southern Italy and Sicily. To the present, other parts of Italy besides the Po valley are still difficult to reach from each other. Without the modern magnificent tunnel under the central Apennine massif, "the Gran Sasso d'Italia"—a long and terrifying 6.2 mile drive—the Adriatic coast of Italy would still be hard to access from the Roman or western side of the mountains. Before the building of the modern autostrada the road from Naples south to Reggio (which connects travelers by ferry to Sicily) was a nightmare of winding roads and hair-pin bends.

THE MOUNTAINS AND HARBORS OF ITALY   Peninsular Italy, i.e. Italy south of the Po, is about 100,000 square miles (slightly larger than Oregon), 680 miles in length and 150 miles wide at its widest point. Only seven percent is plain; the rest is mountainous or hilly. During World War II, the Allies made one of their most tragic and costly mistakes of the war by thinking they could easily march up the Italian peninsula from the south and drive into Central Europe through the Po valley. Time and again they were stopped by the Germans who made skillful use of the mountainous terrain to block their advance. It is no surprise that some of Rome's most hard-fought wars were conducted in these very same mountains against the hill-peoples of Italy and that one of their greatest defeats, the battle of Caudine Forks, came at the hands of Samnite highlanders who dominated the central and southern backbone of Italy. These same Samnites remained disruptive and at times rebellious down to the first century B.C., long after Rome had conquered most of the Mediterranean. Even granted the excellence of Roman roads,

Physical Features of Italy
From northwest to southeast the Apennines divided Italy into a series of disconnected plains: the Po Valley; Etruria/Latium; Campania; and Apulia.

Backward Europe:
Why Europe Lagged Behind the Middle East

Why Europe lagged behind the Middle East is something of an historical puzzle, but it did so for thousands of years. By around 3000 B.C., cities and states were already permanently established in Meso-potamia, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, yet it took nearly 4,000 years more for similar developments to take a hold in continental Europe. It is true that forms of the state and the city did evolve or were imposed on Europe before A.D. 1000, but they did not take hold in a permanent way.

Historians speculate why this was so. One theory has it that the precocious development of cities and states in the Fertile Crescent and Egypt occurred because these regions were essentially giant oases surrounded by inhospitable deserts. Once permanent settlements were achieved, the surrounding deserts constrained further expansion and compelled the inhabitants to concentrate on developing whatever land was available. Large-scale irrigation and agricultural intensifications became essential for further growth and some form of the state was needed to promote these goals. Atlantic and continental Europe, on the other hand, had abundant rainfall, a mild climate, and limitless amounts of land. Once one valley was populated and exploited, surplus population could move on to the next.

If people wonder at the high level of development of the Mediterranean and Middle East under the Romans, the Byzantines and their successors the Arabs, and the correspondingly low level of European progress in the early Middle Ages, the answer is to be found in the late arrival of the state and urbanism to Europe outside the narrow littoral of the Mediterranean.

tunnels and viaducts Italy remained a fragmented land. Geography had a more profound effect on the course of Rome's history than in most countries.

Italy has about 2,000 miles of coastline but relatively few good, natural harbors. Those in the south, Naples and Taranto, were seized early on by colonizing Greeks. Rome's harbor at Ostia was a poor one, clogged with mud banks and sand bars. This, and the strength of the Tiber's current, made access to Rome upriver from Ostia a challenge, so for many centuries ports north and south of Rome at Civita-vecchia and Puteoli had to be used to supply the city. It took the resources of the empire in the time of the emperor Claudius, supplemented later by the work of Trajan, to make Ostia into a practical alternative. Even then, maintaining Ostia was an expensive proposition.
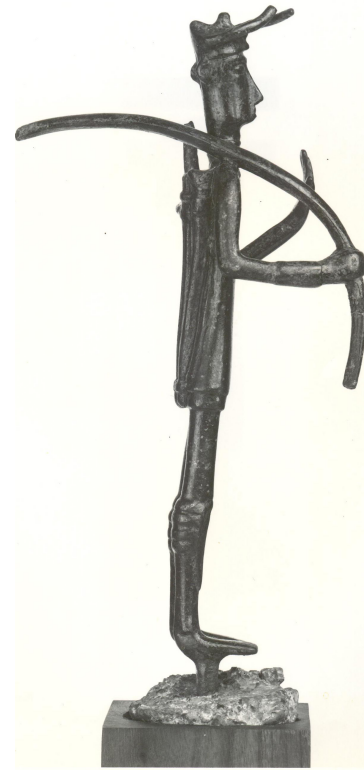
ALL ROADS LEAD TO ROME   In ancient times the richest agricultural land and almost all the mineral wealth of Italy were to be found in the western lowland region fronting the Mediterranean. In addition, the natural lines of communication lay in this area rather than in the mountainous central highlands or on the narrow Adriatic coastal plain. Rome, with its central location astride these routes, could prevent movement north or south or from the Mediterranean into the interior. Long before any roads led to Rome, all the lines of communication converged on the site where a number of hills overlooked a ford on the lower reaches of the Tiber.

Its position in the middle of Italy meant that Rome was vulnerable to attack from many sides—even from the sea—but it also meant that Rome had an advantage in its central lines of communication. As long as it could keep its enemies from coordinating their attacks—or hold one enemy off while coping with the others—Rome could use its central communication lines to deploy its forces quickly from one frontier to another. Diplomacy, therefore, was an important element in Rome's dealings with its neighbors, as important perhaps, as its military resources. The principle of divide and conquer was not a choice but a matter of survival for early Romans. Their understanding of their vulnerability was a critical aspect of Rome's military and political culture.

The Peoples of Italy: A Cultural, Polyglot Mosaic

The Italy of Rome's early years was a complicated mosaic of peoples, cultures, and languages. Celts began to infiltrate across the Alps in the early fifth century B.C. and then came in massive numbers around 400 B.C., settling first in the Po valley and then extending themselves southward along the Adriatic coast. The Greeks had been in Italy and Sicily since the eighth century B.C. Their main concentrations were in the south along the instep of the boot, in the area known as *Magna Graecia*, but they also had important settlements on the Adriatic and Tyrrhenian coasts. The Phoenicians were influential in Etruria, where they found allies to support them against common enemies: the Greeks of Italy, Sicily, and Massilia (modern Marseille). With the exception of the late-arriving Celts,

Unaffected by classical Greek ideas of form, this small bronze statuette from Sardinia breathes the independent and alien spirit of the west.

however, these peoples never ventured deep into the hinterland, and the interior of Italy remained in the hands of two groups of earlier arrivals. The first was made up of Indo-European-speaking peoples, of whom the most important were the Venetians of the Po valley, the Oscans, and Umbrians of the central highlands and east coast, and the Latins of the west on the lower Tiber River. The second group, which did not speak Indo-European languages, included one of the most important of the peoples of Italy: the Etruscans. Others of lesser note were the Messapians of Apulia and the Ligurians of the northwest. Thus, Italy of the early Roman phase was a babel of languages, dialects, and cultures in various stages of development, from the primitive to the most sophisticated.

Of all these peoples, the Oscans were most widespread and the Celts probably the most dangerous. The Latins were confined to the small area between the Tiber and Campania, hemmed in by enemies on all sides. The Oscans and Celts, however, were pre-state, tribal peoples who only slowly made the transition to an

The Principal Languages of Italy around 400 B.C.
Latium, where Latin was spoken, occupies only about 6 percent of Italy.

urban form of life, and then only partially. Organizationally they were backward compared to the Etruscans, Greeks, and Latins, but because of their numbers, military aptitude, and raiding habits, they gave the urban-based peoples of Italy some difficult moments before they were finally overcome.

The Etruscans

Among the peoples of Italy it was the Etruscans (and with their help, the Romans) who made the most remarkable responses to the new influences coming out of the east.[1] Around 700 B.C., the inhabitants of the rich area between the Arno and the Tiber created a flourishing city-state civilization that was recognized throughout the Mediterranean for its opulence and, at times, for its peculiar customs. To

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[1]Like so many other ancient peoples, the Etruscans had the misfortune of having their history written for them by their conquerors, and although the Romans admitted their admiration of the Etruscans in a number of areas, they suppressed or ignored much evidence of their accomplishments. Only after centuries of archaeological research has any independent witness been established at all.

the Greeks they were Tyrsenoi (from which comes "Tyrrhenian Sea") and to the Romans Etrusci or Tusci (hence Etruscan or Tuscan).

THE ETRUSCAN FEDERATION   The Etruscan cities formed a loose federation that met annually to discuss joint action and to celebrate religious festivals in the Greek fashion. Traditionally the number of cities in the federation was twelve, but from the archaeological remains we know of the existence of others, many of whose ancient names are still unknown. While occasionally cooperating, the cities of Etruria also fought bitterly among themselves. Economically, the wealth of Etruria lay in its great deposits of iron, copper, tin, and zinc and in its fertile agricultural areas. Etruscan decorative bronzes and jewelry were unsurpassed in the ancient world, and Etruscan farmers achieved high levels of excellence, inventing, among other things, the cuniculus, or tunnel method of draining river valley bottoms. By eliminating meandering streams and marshes, this technique reduced erosion and expanded cultivatable land.

Although in the Roman period the Etruscans were confined within the geographic boundaries of Etruria, at an earlier date they had an empire that included Campania south of Rome and some of the Po valley. This empire, together with Etruria's own resources, allowed Etruscan aristocrats to enjoy unprecedented prosperity—and to supply, via their graves, the museums of the modern world with some of the greatest art of antiquity. Etruria was at its height between 650 and 450 B.C., but repeated collisions with Greeks, Latins, Oscans, and Celts shattered its military power, and the Etruscans, like their allies the Carthaginians, entered into a period of eclipse.

Etruscan Culture's Legacy to Rome

Literature was not a well-developed aspect of Etruscan culture. Chronicles or simple histories of the individual cities did exist, and mention is made of an author of tragedies, but no poetry, either epic or lyric, is known. However, body of seers and diviners, the *haruspices* (singular, *haruspex*), passed on their learning, in the early period at least, by word of mouth. Etruscan religion, like the religions of the Middle East (but unlike those of Greece and Rome), was believed to have been revealed by the gods and had a strong element of the ecstatic that both attracted and repelled the Romans. Officially, the *haruspices* were held at a distance by the Romans and consulted only in times of extreme emergency. The Romans preferred the consultation of their own state-controlled prophetic books, the Sibylline oracles. The examination of the entrails of sacrificed animals, particularly the liver, *extispicy*, was one of the principal branches of the *disciplina Etrusca*, the Etruscan art of divination.

From the Etruscans the Romans borrowed this technique for discovering the will of heaven but not the personnel that went with it, the *haruspices*. Instead, the taking of the *auspices* (signs), as it was called in Rome, was reserved for the elected magistrates, and assisted if necessary, by the college of *augurs*, which consisted of distinguished political figures, usually former magistrates, not professional priests. Julius Caesar, for example, was both an *augur* and a *pontifex*, or priest. The

auspices had to be taken before any major decision was made, and a special spot on the Capitoline Hill, the *auguraculum*, was reserved for this purpose. All this was taken so seriously that in the first century B.C., when a Roman noble built a house that blocked the view of the magistrate looking for signs in the sky from the *auguraculum*, the house had to be torn down.

ETRUSCAN *LIMITATIO* AND TEMPLES   From the Etruscans the Romans also learned the surveying technique of establishing boundaries (limitatio), which they used in setting up their colonies and dividing the territory of the surrounding countryside, acts that were both practical and religious. The results of these land divisions can still be seen in many areas of the Mediterranean world, especially in North Africa and the north of Italy, where thousands of square miles are broken up into neat, rectilinear grids that pass over natural obstacles without interruption.

Architecturally, the Etruscan temple differed from the Greek, which was freestanding and could be walked around. Instead, the Etruscans placed their temple on a high platform at the rear of a sacred enclosure. It had long, overhanging eaves and a high gable, and the worshippers' attention was immediately focused on the temple when they entered the sacred place. This principle of placing a temple axially at the far end of an enclosure was adopted by the Romans and became a standard architectural device throughout the Roman world. In this arrangement the individual is subordinated to the order and symmetry of the buildings and to the gods of the state who inhabit them. Unlike the classical Greek arrangement of temples and buildings, where the human being is the accepted measure of things, the Romans early came to place the person in an orderly arrangement, symbolizing their belief that all people had preordained places in the scheme of life, places fixed by the gods and interpreted by the state.

The temple of Venus Genetrix dominates the Forum of Caesar in Rome (dedicated in 46 B.C.). The practice of placing temples at the end of long enclosures was borrowed from the Etruscans by the Romans and eventually became a standard architectural feature of cities throughout the Empire.

3. THE LATINS AND EARLY ROME

In the prehistoric site that would become known as Rome, nothing can be identified specifically as Roman. The city that was to dominate Italy was no more than one of a number of villages occupying the many hills of Latium and struggling to maintain themselves against their aggressive neighbors who periodically descended on them to raid or make temporary or permanent settlements among them. The Romans later recalled the arrival of hills-men from Sabine country to the northwest, among them one of the greatest of the Roman clans, the *gens Claudia*, or the Claudians. Etruscans from across the Tiber, and the many other wandering groups from within Latium settled down to form an ethnically and linguistically composite city on the low hills overlooking the Tiber.

The Hills of Rome

These hills were much steeper then than they are now and offered a certain amount of refuge from raiding bands, floods, and wild animals. The archaeological picture from the tenth to the seventh century B.C. shows small villages crowding the tops of the hills, with their cemeteries on the hillsides or at the valley bottoms. In this loose, almost anarchic setting it is easy to imagine migrating clans, individual drifters, and families cast loose from other cities and regions settling on unoccupied lands and working out communal relations with similar groups of earlier settlers. This heterogeneous mixing of peoples in early times found its way into Roman legends regarding the origins of their city. In later times it was recalled that eight of the hills constituted a religious federation (deceptively called the *Septimontium*, The Seven Hills) and that their boundaries were marked by three bridges, which could be opened or closed at will, across the stream that flowed through what was to become the Forum. The god Janus was the protector of these bridges. When he finally received a significant dwelling place in Rome, the opening of the gates of his temple indicated war: the bridges were up and the stream could not be crossed. Likewise, the closing of the gates meant peace—the bridges were down and the stream could be crossed.

The Founders of Rome: The Historiographic Challenge

The Romans, unlike the Greeks, had no recollections of Mycenaean greatness regarding their origins and no Homer to transform their folk tales into poetic legends and myths. On the contrary, the Romans often chose to emphasize the simplicity and heterogeneity of their beginnings. Although Romans were literate from the sixth century B.C., it was a long time before they felt a need to organize the chaotic mass of legends, folk tales, archaic rituals and calendars, treaties, law codes, and family histories that constituted the sources of their early history. Livy, writing in the late first century B.C., expressed a common opinion of his time that the tales of Rome's early history had "more the charm of poetry than of sound
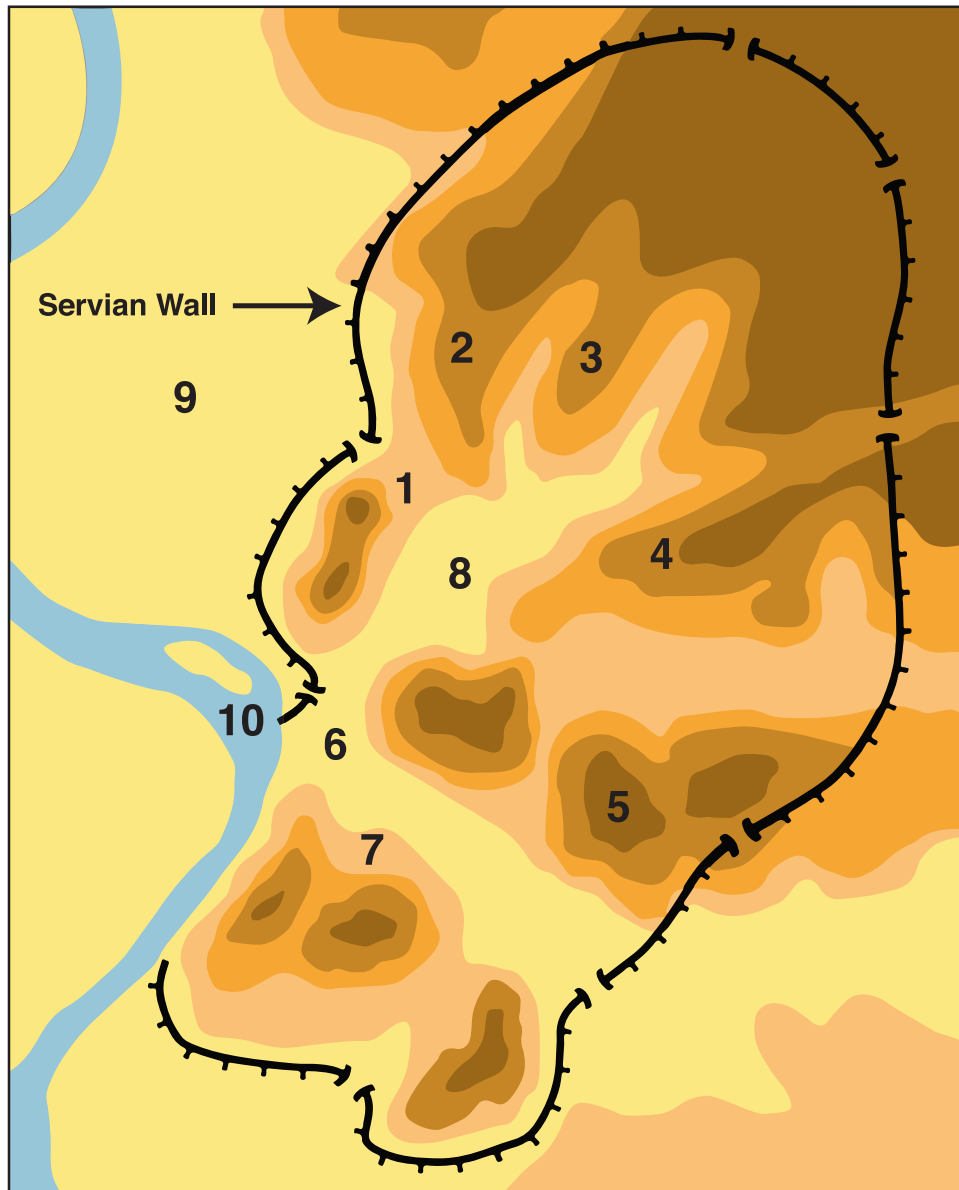
The Hills of Rome and the *Pomerium*
Romans disagreed as to which of the hills should be counted among the customary "Seven Hills" of Rome. The most likely are the following: 1. Capitoline; 2. Quirinal; 3. Viminal; 4. Esquiline; 5. Caelian; 6. Palatine; 7. Aventine. Also included in the map are 8. the Forum and 9. the Campus Martius or "Field of Mars" located outside the *pomerium*, the sacred boundary of the city; and 10. the Tiber Island where the Tiber was most easily crossed. The Servian Walls, built in the fourth century B.C., roughly track the *pomerium*.

historical record" (Livy 1 pref.). Prudently, he concluded that he could "neither affirm nor refute them." The polymath Varro, writing a bit earlier than Livy, came up with a date for Rome's founding that was a model of scholarship but clearly unreliable given the sources he had to work from.

The result is that the early history of Rome is, to the present, a quagmire of scholarly dispute. We know least about the very period we would like to know the most about. What little we do know of it was composed by Roman writers living in the late Republic or early Empire who looked back with longing to a time before the decay and decadence of the Republic when, as Livy said, "we arrive at the dark dawning of our modern day when we can neither endure our vices nor face the remedies needed to cure them."[2]

The Greek Matrix

The Romans' impulse to give a coherent explanation of their origins came in several stages. As their power expanded, they found themselves compelled to give some kind of intelligible account of themselves to their new neighbors and subjects, so by about the mid-third century B.C. an established version of their beginnings began to emerge. The problem was how to fit the strictly local Latin and Roman traditions into the wider, Greek view of things. For centuries the Greeks had plied the Mediterranean from one end to the other and had already worked out synchronous chronologies for the prehistories of most of the peoples they came in contact with, linking them with their own prehistory and such helpful but vague wanderers as Hercules, Jason, Odysseus, and Evander. The local peoples, who knew no more than their own traditions (and even these not very well), were in no position to make such complicated connections. They lacked the information and even the interest. The Greeks, however, had a passionate need to make sense and order out of the anarchic stories of the Mediterranean peoples, thereby giving themselves a central place in history.

Greek or Trojan Founders?

A number of possible founders of Rome, including Odysseus, had already been put forward by the Greeks. However, because the Romans were not eager to acknowledge a Greek founder, they settled on another possibility, the Trojan hero Aeneas, and laboriously worked him into the chronology of Romulus, who may have been part of the native legend. Six additional kings were given schematic reigns to fill in the gap between Romulus and the traditional date of the founding of the Republic (509 B.C.): Numa Pompilius, Tullus Hostilius, Ancus Marcius, Tarquinius Priscus, Servius Tullius, and Tarquinius Superbus. The historical reality behind these kings is impossible to recover at this point. All we can say is that they probably represent early leaders of the developing community, of whom some were Sabine (Numa and Ancus), some Latin (Romulus and Tullus), and some Etruscan (the two Tarquinius and possibly Servius Tullius, despite his Latin-sounding name).

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[2]Livy, *The History of Rome* preface to book 1, tr. de Selincourt.

Origins and Ideology: The Roman Melting Pot

The Roman historical tradition accepted—and sometimes glorified—the belief that the founding of Rome was a joint venture in which a number of peoples of different ethnic origins participated. At the time of Augustus, the historian Livy (59 B.C.–A.D. 17) summarized this view in his description of the thoughts that ran through the mind of Tanaquil, the ambitious wife of Tarquinius Priscus, who became Rome's fifth king. She argued with herself that her husband was getting nowhere in their native Tarquinii in Etruria, where the people despised him because his father had been a foreigner, a Greek. If he would only go to Rome, she believed, things would be different:

Rome was a most attractive place. Here was a new people among whom things happened quickly and where individuals rose because of merit. Surely there would be opportunities there for a courageous and energetic person. After all, Tatius, a Sabine who ruled jointly with Romulus for a short time, had been king in Rome; Numa had been summoned from foreign parts, from Cures, to rule there; King Ancus had a Sabine mother, and only Numa was of noble ancestry in his lineage.

—Livy, 1.34

Although obviously anachronistic and never of more than the most limited application, there was still a lot of truth in this view of Rome, and with varying degrees of openness from century to century the city adhered to it as a principle of statecraft.

The Kings of Rome

As the power of the kings increased, they attempted to check the strength of the heads of the great families (the patricians, the *patres*) by the addition of new senators. A great building program was undertaken to consolidate popular support for the regime, and the largest temple in Italy was erected to Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill. A rampart was built around the city, and the Forum area was drained and paved. According to tradition it was Servius Tullius who abolished the old system of having the clan heads draft their followers and instead made property qualification the sole criterion for service in the army. Greek pottery flowed into Rome, and the city's population expanded rapidly as it came to participate in the general prosperity of the Mediterranean world. For the first time, the Romans, or at least some of them, became literate and came into contact with the more developed world of the Greek and Middle Eastern populations, with all that this implied for the ordering of the city and the revamping of its religious, political, and military institutions.

3. THE REPUBLIC

Expulsion of the Kings

By the late Republic (133–30 B.C.), it was an established literary convention for Rome to portray its kings as a series of progressively deteriorating monarchs, of whom the last, the Etruscan Tarquin the Proud (*Tarquinius Superbus*), was the worst.

In the Roman legendary tradition, Tarquinius Superbus is the stock tyrant of Greek moralistic writing: arrogant, brutal, and corrupt. He and his sister-in-law (his wife-to-be) conspire to kill their respective spouses and then the ruling king—his lover's father. The reign, thus begun with the shedding of so much blood, progresses from one outrage to another until finally a Roman nobleman by the name of Brutus had the courage to organize a revolt and drive out the oppressors. According to this tradition two consuls were chosen to replace the deposed king, and so without bloodshed Roman freedom was won, an event that all classes celebrated joyfully.

The historian Livy makes the point, however, that this was a conditioned freedom. He argued that the anarchic Romans needed the discipline of the kings and were saved from the catastrophe of pure democracy and complete freedom by the reliable hand of the Senate and the annual election of dependable nobles with extraordinary executive power. Understandably, the theme of the expulsion of the Tarquins and the liberation of the Roman people became one of the heroic sagas of Roman history, providing endless material for dramatists, propagandists, and moralists.

Unfortunately, the Romans had no historian to deflate this edifying and bloodless interpretation of the fall of the tyrants, as did Thucydides with regard to a similar tale enjoyed by the Athenians. Were it not for the chance survival of some fragmentary outside sources we would have no account of the founding of the Republic except the self-serving versions of Roman aristocratic families. These sources enable us to see the expulsion of the kings against the wider background of a shifting series of alliances and leagues among Etruscan and Latin cities. It becomes clear that the Tarquins were expelled not by an internal uprising but in

A coin of M. Junius Brutus celebrates the Ides of March 44 B.C. when he and other conspirators murdered Julius Caesar, claiming they were freeing Rome from tyranny. Brutus draws a parallel between this event and the liberation of Rome five hundred years earlier from the tyranny of the Tarquins by another Brutus, a supposed ancestor of his.

an encounter involving the Etruscan city of Clusium (under its king, Lars Porsenna) on one hand and Rome (under the Tarquins), the Latins, and the Greek city of Cumae on the other. It was under the protectorate of Porsenna, who expelled Tarquin from Rome, that the Republic came into existence.

Dangerous Legends

All the talk of liberty and deliverance from oppression was a later elaboration, just as the Athenian version of the liberators Harmodius and Aristogeiton sought to conceal the fact that it was a Spartan army, not Athenian patriots that liberated Athens. The exaggerated account of the reign of Tarquin and the emphasis on the smooth transition from the kings to the Republic were intended to play down the revolutionary implications of the dethronement of a legitimate king by force of arms. Aristocrats of the late Republic looked back and wondered whether the early history of the city might not encourage other potential revolutionaries bent on proclaiming liberty for themselves against alleged oppressors. It was a tradition that could not be suppressed, however, and the term *libertas* (liberty) has an interesting history of its own in the propaganda of the warring political factions of the late Republic. Still, although the traditions of later periods may have distorted the account of the founding of the Republic, the event itself was a turning point in Roman history.

The Patrician State

The new state embodied a fundamental opposition to the old monarchic state that was expressed in the term Republic (from the Latin, *res publica*, or the public realm). The new *res publica* was organized in fundamental opposition to the *res privata*, the private realm, of the Etruscan kings, who were depicted as regarding the state as their own private possession to be passed on like so much private property to their descendants. The source of power in the newly founded state was the people properly assembled (*iure sociati*). The magistrates of the Republic were never above the state but part of it. The power to rule, *imperium*, was granted for only short periods of time and then only for specific tasks and then only with the approval of the gods and the people of Rome as determined by the taking of the auspices.

A TURNING POINT IN HISTORY   In the confusing days after the departure of the Tarquins, the only force in Rome that could be depended on for stability was the army, controlled by the aristocracy. Increasingly, the army in its civilian form became the ruling body of the city. When called into session as a deliberative assembly, it carried on the legislative, judicial, and elective responsibilities of government. From the *centuries*, or units, of which the army was composed, the assembly came to be known as the Centuriate Assembly (*comitia centuriata*). The Senate, a much smaller body, constituted the second branch of government. Originally it was a council of the most important clan heads that had advised the kings in the past. Although it had no formal or constitutional power, it had a great deal of informal influence especially in religious matters. When the ruling king died,

the auspices were said to "return to the Senate," which meant that it had the job of finding someone acceptable to both the gods and the Senate to replace him. This religious role of the Senate continued after the establishment of the Republic and gave it both legitimacy and unchallenged power over the state religion.

The Senate was a highly practical and efficient institution. It was made up of approximately 300 former magistrates. Membership was for life though individual senators could be expelled for failure of morals which, interestingly, included bankruptcy. Consuls or, in their absence, *praetors*, presided. Procedure followed a strictly hierarchical pattern according to which senior magistrates were first called on for their opinion according to the formula: "What does so-and-so say?" Issues were usually decided after the first 30 or so senators gave their opinions. Junior senators listened; they were not consulted.

The expulsion of the kings is one of the great turning points in Roman history. However legendary the sources may appear to be, the underlying event— the change from monarchy to constitutional government—was of world-historical importance. It is comparable in its significance to the political realignment of the Republic in the time of Augustus or to the adoption of Christianity by Constantine. The expulsion of the kings set Rome in a new direction and initiated a new and highly original constitution.

THE NEW FORUM   The shift from an authoritarian to a consensus-driven form of government found visible expression in the new Forum, which was to survive as an influential reminder to all Romans of the momentous events that laid the foundation for the Republic.

Under the kings, the Forum had been a shapeless, unimportant marketplace lying between the Palatine, Capitoline, Viminal, and Esquiline hills. It was unimportant because all actual power resided in the palace of the kings on the Palatine Hill. This changed dramatically when the kings were ejected from Rome and a place suitable for the electoral, legislative, and judicial functions of the new state had to be found. The leaders of the Republic chose the old marketplace, but now gave it definitive form. First the king's house (the *regia*) was transferred from the Palatine Hill to the center of the forum, symbolic of the shift in power from the private to the public realm. The *regia* became the headquarters of the Chief Priest, the *pontifex maximus*. It was now no longer the inaccessible private dwelling of a king, but the public residence of a publicly chosen magistrate.

The *regia* was located in calculated relationship to the Temple of Vesta, goddess of the hearth, and the house of her ministers, the Vestal Virgins, who were also now transferred to the Forum from the Palatine. The hearth of the new community was, like the king's house, now accessible to all. It was no longer the preserve of the monarch. At the other end of the Forum from the *regia* and the Temple of Vesta, the *Comitium*, or meeting place of the people, was created. Now the Forum had two poles, the one political and secular, the other religious, giving visible evidence of the existence of a new state based on a new set of presuppositions, the most fundamental of which was that the business of the community was no longer the private affair of a powerful individual but belonged to all the people; Rome was to be a Republic, not a monarchy.
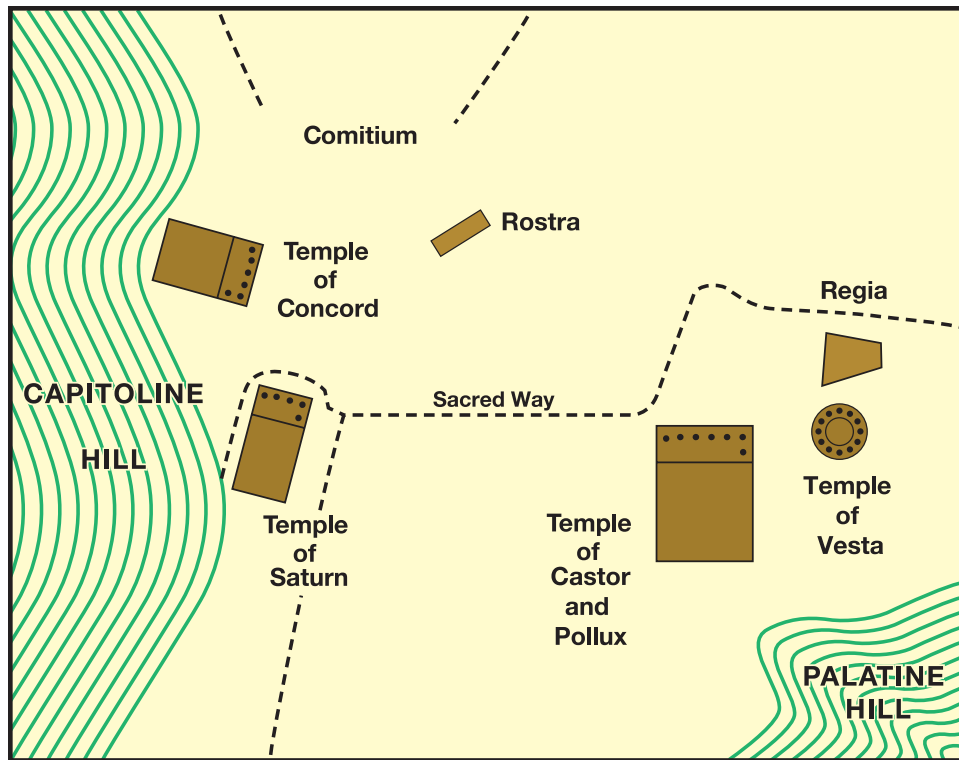
Ground Plan of Early Roman Forum

BREAKING UP THE POWERS OF THE KING In the old order, the king combined in himself the priestly, military, judicial, and political powers of the state. In a monarchy these powers could not be separated without creating independent centers of authority—religious, political, and military—which would have negated the whole point of a monarchy, which is the rule of one. The Republic needed a different system. A free state could not tolerate the concentration of all power in the hands of a single individual. To prevent that from happening, authority had to be redistributed in some way throughout the machinery of the government.

The new state, accordingly, kept the powers and functions of the kings but redistributed them. The magistrates got executive power; the assemblies legislative and judicial powers, and in a complicated way, the priestly power of the kings was distributed between a new magistrate, the King of Rituals (*rex sacrorum*), and various boards of priests. The *rex sacrorum* and the Vestals were delegated to continue the offices and cults special to the kings, without which the state could not continue, but in a setting adjusted to the needs of the Republic.

To make sure the King of Rituals never had any power beyond his limited, if essential religious functions, the founding fathers of the Republic made the position a dead-end job. The King's appointment was for life and he could not hold any other office. Technically and religiously, he was the first among the priests, but

in actuality he was subject to the chief priest, the *pontifex maximus*, who was invariably a politician (Julius Caesar, for example, was *pontifex maximus*).

It was a clever and typically Roman arrangement. First, it maintained the rituals that only the king could perform while making sure the office itself was integrated in a subordinate way to other officials. The punctiliously religious Romans could claim that the new arrangement pleased the gods while satisfying the principle of separation of powers. The *rex sacrorum* performed vital rituals, but he could never be a real king.

The Plebeian State

Despite the achievement attained by selective borrowings from the past, the new Roman state lacked cohesiveness. By definition, the revolution was a victory for the patricians, who took over when the Tarquins were unseated; it was not necessarily a victory for the rest of Roman society. The patricians, through their clients and their special relations with one another, dominated the Senate and the army and through them, the state. The remainder of society was excluded from direct political power, though it had an important ritualistic role to play in the endorsement of new laws and the approval of newly selected magistrates. This role was recognized in the abbreviated formula, SPQR, the Senate and the Roman People (*senatus populusque Romanus*), shorthand for the Roman state even in the empire when the Republic was no more. More of this in a later chapter on society and the state in Rome.

The dominant patricians had their own problems. One of these was the tendency for their more powerful patrician clans to carve out private realms for themselves at the expense of the community as a whole. In the struggle, the remainder of society suffered. Debt bondage and other forms of dependency on the aristocracy increased, as they had in Greek cities during similar stages of development. Dangers, including bad harvests, famine, pestilence, and invasions from the outside threatened Rome. From the end of the sixth century B.C. Oscans highlanders pushed down from their overcrowded, resource-poor mountain homes into the rich agricultural plains of Latium, and on this occasion there was no Etruscan power to hold them back. In 474 B.C. the naval might of Etruria had been destroyed by the Greeks of Sicily, and before the end of the fifth century the Etruscans were driven out of Campania, their richest province. All of Etruria, and along with it Rome, suffered the consequences. After a promising beginning in the early years of the fifth century B.C., the Roman building program came to an end. Imports from Greece soon stopped, and Rome was faced with economic stagnation, increasing indebtedness among the lower classes, and general social unrest.

PLEBEIAN SECESSION   At some point in the fifth century B.C., social relations in Rome had so deteriorated that in a desperate effort to protect themselves from the misgovernance of the patricians, the plebeians resorted to a cultural device traditional among Italian peoples in times of crises: The creation of a Sacred Band. The plebeians withdrew from the city and swore an oath to be loyal to each other and to sacrifice their lives for the common cause. As a Sacred Band, the plebeians held

their own meetings as an alternative to the meetings of the patrician-dominated Centuriate Assembly. They established their own temple to the goddess Ceres on the Aventine Hill as a counter to the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill, the religious center of the patrician state. Custodians called *aediles* were appointed to care for it. The plebeians elected their own leaders, the Tribunes of the People, and swore loyalty to them. Initially two in number to oppose the two patrician consuls, the tribunes eventually grew to constitute a college of ten. Tribunes and aediles were protected by a sacred law (*lex sacer*) that declared that anyone who injured them would be held "sacred" (*sacer*)—that is, could be handed over to the gods for vengeance. Practically speaking, this meant that anyone could kill violators of the sacredness (*sacrosanctitas*) of the plebeian representatives without fear of retribution, divine or human.

The tribunes claimed the right to offer protection or help (*auxilium*) and if necessary to intervene with their veto (*intercessio*) on behalf of plebeians threatened by the misconduct of patrician magistrates or the institutions they controlled. Protected only by the sacred oath, tribunes stepped between victim and persecutor. According to the Roman historian Livy, patrician magistrates were brought to trial and were even condemned to death before the assembled plebeians. The reality behind this memory was probably the out-of-hand lynching of patricians who had violated the sacred character of the tribunes.

IDEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE PLEBS   By invoking the protection of the gods and acting as a religious community, the plebeians were able to legitimize their activity and wring important concessions from the patricians by refusing or threatening to refuse military service at critical moments when the city was threatened by outside invasion. In the early stages of the struggle between patricians and plebeians (the Conflict of the Orders, as it is conventionally known as), the objectives of the plebeians were largely defensive and protective, and their method of procedure was informal. Gradually, however, the plebeians developed a sense of political identity and began to see themselves as constituting a quasi-independent political community within the Roman state. From this consciousness derived the second major assembly of Rome, the Council of the Plebs (*concilium plebis*), a parallel and alternative assembly to the patrician-controlled Centuriate Assembly.[3] Unlike the Centuriate Assembly, however, the Concilium Plebis was organized in geographical units called tribes. Originally there were four urban tribes, corresponding to the four regions of the city of Rome, and sixteen rural tribes, because the majority of Romans, plebeians and patricians alike, were rural farmers. In the third century B.C. the number of tribes was finally fixed at thirty-five.

Rome's First Law Code: The Twelve Tables

Another achievement of the plebeians was the publication of Rome's first law code, the so-called Twelve Tables. It was considered by the Romans to be the source of

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[3]At a later stage of constitutional evolution, the use of the *concilium plebis* for elections and legislation became common. When convened by a consul or praetor rather than a tribune, the Council of the Plebs was known as the Tribal Assembly (*comitia tributa*).

all law, private and public, governing such matters as the rights and duties of families, forms of marriage, inheritance, the definition of some crimes and their punishments, and the right of appeal. It was learned by heart by generations of children and played a role analogous to the English *Magna Carta* or the Bill of Rights. The laws themselves were not favorable to the plebeians, and for a long time the administration of the law itself remained under the control of the patricians. Nevertheless, the fact that some aspects of the law had been made public was an achievement, and the general principle of establishing a single code that applied to all members of society by a uniform, universally known process was a step of major importance. It represented a continuation of the conscious molding of institutions to serve the needs of the people rather than the tacit assumption that the law was divine and outside human control, requiring a sacred priesthood to administer it. This came to be reflected in the use of language, where *ius*, the term for the secular concept of law, came to be applied to one body of law, and *fas*, which was reserved for sacred law, was applied to another.

5. THE PATRICIAN-PLEBEIAN STATE

The beginnings of patrician–plebeian concord in the fifth century B.C. were savagely interrupted by the sack of Rome by the Celts, or Gauls, as they were known to the Romans, in 390 B.C. The resulting misery and economic dislocation unsettled the community, and the patrician–plebeian struggle began all over again at a new level of intensity.

The main problems were those of land distribution, debt, and access to political office—a trio of problems that plagued all ancient societies. Rarely was anything unique about the problems themselves, and the only variable factor was the different ways in which they were handled from one society to another. Sparta and Athens, for example, took a radical approach, whereas Rome followed a much slower and more conservative course. As an expanding state, Rome was able to avoid facing these issues for some time. It was not until the Licinian-Sextian laws of about 367 B.C. that the right of plebeian access to public land (i.e., land won by the state in war) was established.

Access to Political Office

A vital issue also settled in 367 B.C. was that of the admission of non-patricians to the consulship. The problem here was not a law against the admission of these people, because no such law existed and plebeians had in fact been elected to the consulship in the first half of the fifth century B.C. What was involved was the breaking of what had become a de facto custom, which required a law for its reversal. Gradually, non-patricians began to make their way into the highest offices, and a new elite, the patrician–plebeian nobility, emerged. Among the old patrician families who were willing to cooperate with the rising plebeian notables were the Fabii, Aemilii, Sulpicii, and Servilii, who found compatible partners in the Licinii, Sextii, and Plautii—names that were to appear regularly in the lists of Republican magistrates for the next three and a half centuries.

A Conservative's View of the Tribunate

In the first century B.C., the conservative leaning senator Cicero wrote a work bearing the same name as Plato's famous dialogue, The Laws. *In his dialogue, Cicero says the following about the tribunate. He is responding to his brother Quintus:*

> Quintus, you see the deficiencies of the tribunate very clearly, but it is unfair when criticizing an institution to omit its advantages and pick only on its weaknesses. By this method the consulship could be condemned if we were to just emphasize the bad deeds of some people who held that office. I recognize that there is potential for mischief in the power of the tribunate, but we could not have the good that was sought when the office was established, without the evil also. "The power of the tribunes of the people is too great," you say. True, but the power of the people themselves is much crueler—and more violent. Yet this power is made milder when there is a leader to control it. Think what it would be like if there were no leader at all! For a leader is conscious of his own danger, whereas the people have no sense of danger whatsoever. "But" you will say, "the tribunes sometimes stir up the people." Yes, but they often calm them too.

—Cicero, *De Legibus*, 3.23

Plebeian access to other magistracies followed. The same year that the Licinian-Sextian laws were passed (ca. 367 B.C.), the number of commissioners who regulated various religious functions was increased from two to ten, of whom five were to be plebeians (*decemviri sacris faciundis*). The patrician *curule aedileship*, which was set up in 367 B.C. to share the administration of the city with the plebeian aediles, was soon open to plebeians also, and the important new office of praetor (established in 366 B.C.), which took over the consul's civil jurisdiction over the city, was opened to them in 336 B.C. Other offices to which the plebeians gained admission were the dictatorship (a temporary emergency appointment) in 356 B.C. and the censorship in 351 B.C. However, it was not until 300 B.C. that they achieved access to the important priesthoods of the pontiffs and augurs by the *lex Ogulnia*. In that year the number of pontiffs was raised from five to nine, and the number of augurs from four to nine, the additions in both cases being plebeians. Also in 300 B.C., at the end of lengthy development and elaboration, the right of appeal to the people in capital cases and in cases involving scourging was established by the *lex Valeria*.

Additional steps toward breaking down the exclusivity of the patricians came in 304 B.C. with the publication, by the aedile Gnaeus Flavius, of a handbook of legal phrases and procedures (*legis actiones*) and the posting in the Forum of a calendar that showed days on which public business could be transacted. These measures complemented and continued the reforms introduced by the Twelve Tables, because it was not only the law that was made public but also many of the secrets by which it was handled.

Appius Claudius Caecus

Part of the curtailment of the patricians and the increase in importance of the plebeians is reflected in the activity of the first great Roman statesman we can actu-

ally identify by name, Appius Claudius Caecus. As censor in 312 B.C. he allowed freedmen to enroll in the tribe of their choice and admitted sons of freedmen to the Senate. The first measure was probably directed toward resolving a problem occurring in newly incorporated territory that continued to be inhabited by its native population, some of whom would have been slaves. It was logical to allow these individuals, upon their manumission and acquisition of Roman citizenship, to enroll in their own local tribes instead of compelling them to register in the four urban tribes, where their influence was greatly curtailed. This measure, which would have gone a long way toward breaking the control of local landlords, was reversed in 304 B.C. but revived several times thereafter in succeeding centuries. What to do with former slaves was an issue not easily resolved by the Republic.

The *Lex Hortensia*

The final step in the long history of the patrician–plebeian state came in 287 B.C., when the Tribal Assembly, the *comitia tributa*, became the principal law-making body of the state and its decrees—or plebiscites, as they were called—acquired the force of law without needing the endorsement of the Senate. This law, the *lex Hortensia*, came as a result of more than a century and a half of struggle. After 287 B.C., the decisions of the Tribal Assembly and the Centuriate Assembly had equal force and bound all citizens, whether rich or poor, freeborn or freedmen. Henceforth the Tribal Assembly rather than the Centuriate Assembly became the principal legislative body of the state. At approximately the same time it acquired the right to ratify treaties with foreign powers and became a court of appeal for those who had been fined.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

With the passage of the *lex Hortensia*, the blending of the two predominant political and social elements of the state was formally completed. A highly competitive, mostly talented and enlightened elite was guaranteed sole access to the high secular and religious offices of the state. In return, the patrician-plebeian nobility guaranteed their loyalty to the state. Even in the worst days of the war against Hannibal, the elite never weakened. In any state, ancient or modern, the depth of the loyalty of this group is of critical importance to a state's survival, not to mention its morale and flourishing. On the other hand, the non-elite element in Rome also had its guarantees. It received or could expect to receive the legal security of persons and possessions, consultation to some extent on major policy and legislative issues, and a share in the loot of war. This consensus or compact was to hold for two centuries before the Republic's success in war undermined it.

The military developments of the fourth century, although important, were only part of the larger transformation of Roman society that took place during that little-known period. Rome's openness to outsiders (a characteristic it had from the beginning), its capacity to absorb and adapt them to its own political and military needs, and its inner flexibility and ability to find ways for the dif-

ferent classes to interact were the essential foundations for its success in this and succeeding centuries.

6. THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ACHIEVEMENTS OF EARLY ROME: AN ANALYSIS

Why Early Rome was Successful: The *polis*

The remarkable social, political, and military achievements of Rome's early centuries deserve emphasis. It was in those obscure, distant, almost mythical times that the Romans came up with their own, wholly original version of the *polis*.

In many respects the emergence of the city of Rome was unremarkable. Rome emerged when cities were springing up all around the Mediterranean—in Syria, Phoenicia, Greece, North Africa, and southern Spain. In Italy the Romans had plenty of models to imitate: Greek in the south, Etruscan in the north. Not far away across the Tyrrhenian Sea was the prosperous city of Carthage. Yet none of these *poleis* ever achieved anything near Rome's power, though Tarentum in southern Italy and Carthage in Africa certainly tried. Nor, for that matter, did any of the *polis*-states of Greece or Phoenicia. Again, it was not for want of trying. Athens and Sparta each had large hegemonic ambitions over other Greek states. Their rule, however, was short lived and unpopular.

At its most fundamental level, Rome's success depended on its *polis* constitution. In its generic Greek form, the *polis* was a revolutionary breakthrough in human social and political engineering which produced a new type of polity. Citizens were stake-holders in the execution of polices in which they participated. Being a citizen was equivalent to owning a part of the city and therefore bestowed a self-interested duty to defend, protect and, if possible, extend the city's possessions. *Polis* armies were, comparatively speaking, made up of well-trained and well-motivated citizen militias, not unwilling draftees who had no share and no interest in the government of their states. This combination of being able to establish political consensus and citizen participation in the military gave *poleis* power out of proportion to their population. Small colonies of Greeks were able to carve out territories for themselves in hostile lands from Georgia in the Black Sea to the western end of the Mediterranean. A handful of them were able to fend off the might of the Persian Empire during two invasions of the Greek homeland. The Greek historian and statesman Polybius was thinking along these lines when he said, while analyzing Rome's rise to hegemony, that "the most powerful agent for success or failure of any state is its constitution" (6.1).

Relative to its population, more people were involved in a *polis*' civic and military affairs than any previous form of society. As a consequence, more talent was tapped and more human energies and loyalties were released than was possible, for example, in the much larger but less free empires of the Middle East. When functioning properly, *polis*-type societies were extraordinarily efficient institutions. Major policy matters such as decisions for war could be made quickly and had the advantage that those who were going to execute them—pay the bills or

fight the wars—were directly involved in the decision-making processes. They therefore had only themselves to blame if things went wrong later.

Roman Exceptionality?

What made Rome different was its success in transforming its basic or generic Greek *polis*-format into a hybrid form of the *polis* that preserved the best features of the traditional *polis* city-state while overcoming most of its inherent disadvantages. Rome was a unified society, yet, as we have seen, it was made up of two separately defined groups—patricians and plebeians—each with its own institutional means of doing public business. Although the formula seems like one designed for stalemate and inactivity, it provided Rome with the strength not just to fend off all invaders—a triumph in itself, given Rome's vulnerable position in Italy—but also to engage in a round of conquests that no Etruscan, Greek, or Phoenician *polis* came anywhere close to equaling. Clearly, what this dual system did for Rome was to provide patricians and plebeians, rich and poor, with a satisfactory means of working together, a method of achieving consensus within a diverse citizen body. The system acknowledged the rights and interests of each of the state's two principal constituencies without alienating either.

In this way, Rome managed to solve the problem that plagued many—if not most—Greek *poleis*, namely, the tendency of factions within a state, at moments of internal crisis, to seek outside help to settle their differences.[4] These factions, whether oligarchic, aristocratic, or democratic, were, in effect, willing to betray their states to their enemies for their own narrow purposes. Rome solved this problem and created a powerfully unified, although complex, state. The process by which its social and political consensus was achieved took well over a century to complete.

In addition to avoiding internal civil strife (*stasis*) Rome developed over time highly efficient techniques of incorporating outsiders in its commonwealth (to be discussed in the next chapter). By contrast, most Greek *poleis* were reluctant to extend their citizenship to aliens, believing that the rewards of citizenship belonged to its native inhabitants and would be diluted if strangers were allowed in too easily. Rome's acknowledged and glorified heterogenous ethnic origins—unlike some Greek cities' claims to be autochthonous ("earth-born")—helped smooth the way for the amalgamation of non-Romans into its citizen body. We have seen above that the main gist of Tanaquil's argument was precisely Rome's openness to outsiders (p. 3–16).

Unfortunately, the development is poorly documented, which may explain why it has not received the attention that later periods have been given. Furthermore, ancient and modern historians disagree over many factual matters as well as their interpretation. Nonetheless, the system clearly worked well enough to bring out the best in most of its citizens. For centuries, Romans were able to persuade themselves, as well as millions of non-Romans, that it was worthwhile to belong to this unusual state.

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[4]For the historian Polybius, treason in Greek states was such a big issue he devoted an entire essay to the subject, 18.13–15. Rome, he noted, avoided this problem.

Consensus: A Word With a Very Long History

Con-sensus (kôn-sĕn'sûs), consent [Old French *consentir*, from Latin *consentire*, to feel together, agree, from *con,* with + *sentire*, to feel]. **1**. *Archaic*. To agree, to concur. **2.** To give assent or approval.

Based on Webster's *New International Dictionary*, second edition (G. & C. Merriam Co., Springfield, 1956)

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Rome's geographical location in the Western Mediterranean gave it a number of advantages and disadvantages. What were these?

2. What was the significance of Rome's central-place location in the Italian peninsula?

3. Rome borrowed selectively from their Etruscan neighbors. What did the Romans accept, what did they reject, and why?

4. What was the architectural difference between a Greek and an Etruscan temple, and what significance did this have? Why did Rome prefer the Etruscan to the Greek form?

5. Greek historiography posed a challenge for Romans when they began to think about their origins. They rejected Greeks as possible founders of their city and instead chose a survivor from the sack of Troy. Why choose a loser?

6. What was the difference between the *res privata* of the kings and the *res publica* of the new constitution that came into being after the expulsion of the Etruscan kings?

7. What was the Patrician State? Who were its magistrates? What institutions came into being with its creation?

8. How did the architecture of the Forum reflect the constitution of the new state?

9. What drove the plebeians to create their own Plebeian State? What techniques did they use to bring it into existence? What were its institutions and officers?

10. What was the significance of the Twelve Tables? What innovations did it introduce?

11. How did plebeians attain to the magistracies of the Patrician State? What effect did access to offices of the state have in reconciling the plebeians to the patricians?

12. Evaluate the overall achievements of the new plebeian-patrician state.