From Village to Empire: A Brief History of the Roman Empire

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Wednesdays, February 28th - April 4th
1:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.
Room 124, Leeds House Building

Schedule of topics:

Week 1

Rome's First Centuries
Rome under the kings
The Republic
Dominance in Italy
War and Peace

Roman began to develop into a city-state in the eighth and seventh centuries. Romulus, certainly a figure of myth, founded Rome in 753 BC, a date that came to be generally adopted. Seven kings supposedly ruled in Rome. In the sixth century, in Rome, one of the largest and wealthiest cities in Italy, the monarchy fell. The Romans began to develop and elaborate the political system of the classical Roman Republic, which would govern the city and eventually much of the Mediterranean world for centuries.

Week 2

The Republic
Carthage
Provinces and Empire
The senate and people
Social War

The Roman Republic became the dominant state in the Mediterranean. The expansion of Roman power beyond the Italian peninsula, would put major strains on the Republic's traditional structure. Rome's

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annexation of territories beyond Italy was a gradual, haphazard process. Rome offered citizenship to all communities of allies, but only under duress. Members of all allied communities gained the right to vote, and to run for office, in Rome itself. It changed the administrative, political, and cultural complexion of Italy.

**Week 3**

*End of the Republic*

Sulla and his legacy

Political stalemate

Pompey, Crassus, and Caesar

Crossing the Rubicon

In November 82, the Senate appointed Sulla as dictator. Rome and Italy were at Sulla's mercy. Their conqueror possessed a clear vision of the reforms required to return the state to its old stability. To many senators, Caesar's adoption of the title "perpetual dictator", several decades later, marked the end of all hope, the final provocation. By early 44, they found Caesar's dictatorship intolerable.

**Week 4**

*Augustus and the Early Empire*

Casualties of the fighting

Sole ruler

The empire and its expansion

The early principate

After the assassination of Caesar, his eighteen-year-old grandnephew Octavian declared his acceptance of the inheritance. At the age of only thirty-three, Octavian achieved the undisputed control of the Roman world. The senate bestowed upon Octavian the new name Augustus, and renamed one month in the same way, to symbolize break with the past. Peace within the empire was counted as the greatest blessing. The fifty-four years of Julio-Claudian power after Augustus' death revealed strengths and weaknesses of the imperial power.

**Week 5**
**The Empire: from expansion to consolidation**

Better era

Theatres, circuses, gladiators

Christianity

Provinces

In 96 the empire ushered in an era that would later be praised as the most happy and prosperous period. Ever more responsible administration was linked to peace and prosperity. The period was free of the searing persecution of Christians, and it also had the good fortune to be spared lengthy warfare with external foes. From some perspectives at least, Rome's expansion into provinces may seem beneficial. They saw the introduction of the Latin language, Roman religion, and cities in the Roman style.

*Week 6*

*Roma Aeterna*

Reforms

Constantine the Great

Changes

The City is taken

In 235, mutinous soldiers acclaimed as emperor their ringleader. He was to be the first of the so-called "soldier-emperors", and this rule marks the beginning of a turbulent era in which the empire suffered severe pressures. Diocletian reorganized the Roman world, and Constantine chose Byzantium for his eastern capital, openly tolerating Christianity and being baptized before his death. He reaffirmed the ideal of a united empire overseen by one emperor. But by the beginning of the fifth century, it was plain that the northern borders were very permeable.

**Recommended readings for continued learning:**


**Other interesting resources:**

Documentaries:


Movies:

*Quo Vadis* (1951).


*Spartacus* (1960).