

Rome and Its Empire



Rome is the capital of Italy, as well as its largest city. It boasts a population of more than 2.5 million people. Archaeologists believe that the city is at least 2,500 years old.

The city has played a pivotal role in world history for much of its existence. Its origins are shrouded in mystery. Legend has it that Rome was founded on April 21 in the year 753 BCE by a pair of twins named Romulus and Remus. According to the story, a jealous uncle ordered their deaths while they were still infants. But the servant who had been ordered to kill them refused. Instead of killing them, he put them in a basket and set them adrift on a river.

After a time, the basket drifted to shore, and a female wolf found the crying orphans. She took them in and cared for them. They were later discovered by a shepherd and his wife, who raised them as their own. Romulus and Remus grew to be powerful leaders. Rome was founded by Romulus (and named after him) as a place for the homeless to live.

For centuries, that legend was taken as fact. But today, most scholars think that Rome's birth was far less dramatic. In fact, it's most likely that the city was founded by a group of goat herders. The first Roman homes were probably built where the ruins of the Roman Forum are located today.



History also shows that in 27 BCE, Rome became the center of a new government. At first, the city's influence was local and weak. By the year 117 CE, however, it ruled the largest and most powerful empire ever created.



The Romans brought great progress to the lands that they ruled. They provided housing and clean water for the masses. They set up programs to help the poor. They also built thousands of beautiful temples for worship and hundreds of amphitheaters for public events. Many of these structures still stand, including the famous Roman Coliseum.

The Roman Empire was ruled by a series of emperors. The emperor met with a Senate to pass laws. But since Senate members were both chosen and fired by the emperor, he actually ran the government on his own. The Senate did have some power, however. For instance, they got to choose the next emperor after one died.



Some emperors were terrible rulers. The worst of these was probably Caligula. He is recalled today as a violent tyrant, who ruled his people by frightening them into obedience.

Other emperors cared for and helped their subjects. As a result, they were very popular. When the city of Rome caught fire in 64 CE, the Emperor Nero opened his palace to people who lost their homes in the catastrophe. He ordered new houses to be built out of fireproof stone and had food delivered to survivors so they did not starve.

The Roman Empire ended in the year 476 CE. There are many theories as to why it fell. Some scholars believe that the Empire became so big it could no longer be defended from enemies. Others blame a string of very bad emperors. Still others think that the Roman Empire did not really fall. They maintain that it simply grew and transformed into a different type of society.