

Chapter 10: Rome: From City-State to Empire: 10-2a Rome's Conquest of Italy

Book Title: World Civilizations

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## 10-2a Rome's Conquest of Italy

Under this mixed government of aristocrats and commoners, the Roman city-state gradually and painfully became the master of the Italian Peninsula. Until about 340 B.C.E., the almost constant conflicts focused on a strip of land along the west coast. The Romans led a federation of tribes living in this plain of Latium (LAH-tee-um) first against the Etruscans and then against other Italians (see [Map 10.1](#)).

During these almost continuous conflicts, the Romans learned how to ensure that yesterday's enemies became today's friends and allies. A pragmatic and flexible people, the Roman governing groups soon realized that their original practice of humiliating and enslaving the conquered was counterproductive. Instead, they began to encourage the subject populations to become integrated with Rome—to become “good Romans,” regardless of their ethnic or historical affiliations. The Romans gave partial citizenship rights to the conquered Italians as long as they did not rebel and they agreed to supply troops when Rome called. This arrangement was advantageous to the conquered because it eased their tax burden, assured them of Roman assistance against their own enemies, and gave them wide-ranging powers of self-government.

Some of the conquered were eventually allowed to become full citizens, which meant they could run for office and vote in Roman elections, serve in the Roman army and bureaucracy, and have protection of property and other preferential legal rights that were not available to noncitizens.

The upper classes of the conquered Italians and Greeks were soon eager to Latinize themselves and thus to qualify as full citizens. They achieved this status by intermarrying with Romans, adopting the Latin language, and accepting the basic elements of Roman custom and law.

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