

Chapter 10: Rome: From City-State to Empire Chapter Introduction
Book Title: World Civilizations
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Chapter Introduction

It is the nature of a Roman to do, and to suffer bravely.

—Livy

A Roman Family

The ancient Romans, as a whole, passed laws that supported conservative social values. One of these was the importance of the family and honoring the family ancestors. Despite sumptuary laws that denied rights to women and children, most families were closely knit, and the love that existed in the family and between husbands and wives seem to differ little from modern families. This fact is well attested by the funerary reliefs, like this one, and grave inscriptions that still can be seen in the tombs, graveyards, and catacombs around and beneath the ancient city.

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Chronology

c. 750–509 B.C.E. Etruscans rule Rome

c. 509–31 B.C.E. Roman Republic

300s–200s B.C.E. Conquest of Italy

264–202 B.C.E. The First and Second Punic Wars

50s–30s B.C.E. The two triumvirates

27 B.C.E.–14 C.E. Reign of Augustus

31 B.C.E.–180 C.E. Pax Romana

14–69 C.E. Julio-Claudian emperors

69–96 C.E. Flavian emperors

161–180 C.E. Marcus Aurelius

The successor to the Greek civilization in the Mediterranean basin and the Near East was Rome, an Italian city-state that grew to be an empire and the dominant power in East and West alike. Although Rome is considered the successor to Hellenistic Greece, they actually overlapped in time, and Rome itself is in many ways a Hellenistic entity. In this chapter we review several centuries of Rome's growth—from an insignificant Italian town dominated by a traditional upper class to an unusual combination of aristocracy and merit, subscribing to pseudo-democratic principles: the Roman *res publica* (RAYS POOB-lee-cah), or republic. The disparity of civic means and ends generated by territorial expansion eventually became too much, and from the ruins of this Roman republic there arose a vision of empire that has served the Western world as a model ever since. For two and a half centuries, Rome maintained peace and relative prosperity throughout most of Europe and the Mediterranean basin. Striking an uneasy but sustainable balance between the powers of a policy-making group in Rome and provincial officers drawn from many peoples, the system proved successful in a variety of circumstances, meeting needs both local and imperial.

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