

Rome's Conquest of the Italian Peninsula: 509-264bc

Rome's first period of expansion included more than 200 years of almost constant warfare. During this time, Rome gradually took control of the entire Italian peninsula.

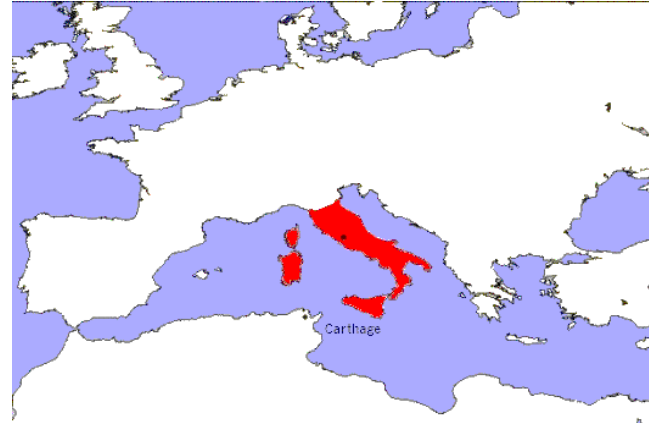
After the last Etruscan king was overthrown in 509bc, the Romans began to expand their territory and influence. In 493bc, Roman leaders signed a treaty (agreement) with their Latin neighbors to the south. The treaty said, "There shall be peace between the Romans and all the communities of Latins as long as heaven and earth endure." The new allies agreed to band together against their common enemies. During the next 100 years, the Romans fought a number of wars against the Etruscans as well as against tribes living in hills in the area around Rome.

Then, in 390bc, Rome nearly came to an end. A band of Gauls, a warlike people from the north, crushed a Roman army and surged into the city. Most of Rome's people fled into the countryside. The Gauls, looted the city and burned most of it down.

With the city ruins, the Romans considered fleeing to some other place. Instead, they bravely decided to start over. They rebuilt their



Lucius Quintius Cincinnatus (left) who rescued Rome from attacks by a neighboring tribe.



Territory controlled by Rome, c. 264bc

city and surrounded it with walls. They also built up their army. Before long, Roman soldiers were on the march again.

During the 300's bc, Rome conquered the Etruscans and many neighboring

tribes. To the south, they battled a people called the Samnites, as well as several Greek cities. By 275 bc, Rome's conquest of the Italian peninsula was complete. Rome now controlled the Italian peninsula. But Rome's expansion came at great cost. Romans had been fighting wars for two centuries, and the Gauls had once destroyed their city.

As Rome's territory grew, the city had to keep a large, permanent army to defend it and the conquered lands. As a result, more and more Romans were forced to serve in the army. Most of the soldiers were plebeians. This was one reason for the struggle between the plebeians and the patricians.

Roman citizens were not the only ones who paid a cost for Rome's expansion. Rome allowed the people of some defeated cities to become Roman citizens. But other cities were not treated as well. Many received more limited privileges, such as the ability to trade with Rome. And Roman allies had to pay Roman taxes and supply soldiers for Roman armies.

By 264 bc, Rome had more citizens and well-trained soldiers than any other power in the Mediterranean world.

Overseas expansion during the Punic Wars 264-146bc

During Rome's second period of expansion, it fought three savage wars with Carthage, a powerful city in North Africa, for control of the Mediterranean region.

When the wars began, Carthage held North Africa, most of Spain, and part of Sicily and most of the trade in the western Mediterranean. The Greek cities in southern Italy had frequently clashed with Carthage over trading rights. When Rome conquered these cities, it was drawn into the fight with Carthage.

Rome's wars with Carthage are called the **Punic Wars**, after the Greek name for the people of Carthage. The First Punic War began in 264bc. It was fought mostly at sea. Carthage had a very powerful navy, but the Romans built up their own navy by copying and improving on the Carthaginians' ship designs. A decisive victory at sea in 241bc won the war for the Romans who took over Sicily as well as other islands.

The Second Punic War started 23 years later. In 218bc, Hannibal, a brilliant Carthaginian general, surprised the Romans by marching his army from Spain across the Alps and into Italy. His troops rode elephants and braved snowstorms, landslides, and attacks by local

tribes. For 15 years, Hannibal's men fought the Romans. In 202bc, Hannibal returned home to defend Carthage against a Roman army. There he was defeated in battle that ended the Second Punic



In 218bc, the Carthaginian general Hannibal led his troops across the Alps to attack Rome

War. Carthage was forced to give Spain and huge sums of money to Rome.

For about 50 years, there was peace between Rome and Carthage. Then, spurred on by Cato, a senator who demanded

the destruction of Carthage, the Romans attacked once more.

The Third Punic War lasted three years. In 146bc, the Romans burned Carthage to the ground. They killed many people and sold others into slavery. Rome was now the greatest power in the Mediterranean region. It controlled North Africa, much of Spain, Macedonia, and Greece.

The Punic Wars expanded Roman power and territory, but Rome's victories came at a price. Families mourned for the countless soldiers who had died in the long wars. In addition, people living outside Rome suffered huge losses. Hannibal's army had destroyed thousands of farms. Other farms had been neglected while farmers went off to fight in Rome's armies. By the time the soldiers returned home, grain was flowing into Italy from Sicily and other places. Small farms were being replaced by large estates where the wealthy planted vineyards and raised livestock. Unable to compete with the wealthy landowners, many poor farmers had to sell their land.

Although riches and slaves flowed into Rome from the conquered lands, so did new customs. Many of the new ideas came from Greece. Wealthy Romans competed with one another to build Greek-style homes and beautiful temples.



Territory controlled by Rome, c. 146bc

Expansion During the Final Years of the Republic 145-44bc

By 145bc, Roman conquests had brought great wealth to the city of Rome. But they had also put the republican form of government under great strain. By the end of Rome's third period of expansion, the Republic collapsed.

The final years of the republic were marked by still more wars. Many of Rome's allies resented having to pay Roman taxes and fight in Roman armies without enjoying the rights of citizens. In 91bc, they rebelled. To end the revolt, Rome agreed to let all free Italians become Roman citizens.

Rome also had to fight to put down slave revolts. As Romans conquered other lands, they brought hundreds of thousands of prisoners to Roman lands. They turned them into slaves who labored on farms and in the city. Romans often treated their slaves very harshly. A slave named Spartacus led a famous revolt in 73bc only to be killed in battle with thousands of the surviving rebels executed.

There was trouble in the city, too. With so many slaves to do the work, thousands of farmers and laborers had no jobs. They crowded into Rome, becoming a mob that an ambitious leader could turn into an army.



Julius Caesar was stabbed 23 times and bled to death at the door of the Senate

Rome's army was producing many such leaders. Generals used their armies to gain fame in far-off lands and then fight for power in Rome. In one civil war in the 80s bc, 200,000 Romans were killed.

Forty years later, another civil war broke out between two ambitious generals, Pompey and Julius Caesar. Pompey had expanded Roman rule to the eastern lands of Syria and the island of Cyprus. Caesar had conquered much of Gaul. By 49bc, Pompey was back in Rome, while Caesar commanded an army to the north of Italy, across the Rubicon River. Both men wanted to control Rome, but Pompey had the support of the Roman Senate.

Urged on by Pompey, the Senate forbade Caesar from entering Italy with his army. Caesar disobeyed. On January 11, 49bc, he crossed the Rubicon with his army. After three years of fighting, he defeated Pompey. The frightened Senate named Caesar dictator for life. With Caesar in control, the Republican government was over.

As dictator, Julius Caesar introduced many reforms. He gave work to thousands of Romans by starting projects to make new roads and public buildings. To keep the poor happy, he staged gladiator contests they could watch for free. He also adopted a new calendar that is still used today (the Julian calendar).

Caesar had a vision of Rome as a great empire. He started new colonies and granted citizenship to the people of cities in Gaul and Spain. On March 15th, 44bc, a group of enemies stabbed Caesar to death as he was entering the Senate.

The plotters who killed Caesar thought they were saving the republic, but they were wrong. Instead, a true Roman Emperor soon emerged to take Caesar's place.



Territory controlled by Rome, c. 44bc

Rome Becomes an Empire 44bc-14ad

Caesar's murder plunged Rome into a series of civil wars that lasted for more than 10 years. When the fighting ended, one man stood as the absolute ruler of Rome. He was Octavian, Caesar's grandnephew and adopted son. So began the Roman Empire, and Rome's fourth period of expansion.

To gain power, Octavian had to defeat jealous rivals. One of them was Marc Antony, a popular general. Antony had married Queen Cleopatra of Egypt. In 31bc, Octavian defeated Antony and Cleopatra in a sea battle near Actium, Greece. His army chased the lovers to Egypt, where they killed themselves. Octavian was now the supreme ruler of the Mediterranean region.

Octavian knew that the Romans prized their republic. He told them he was restoring the authority of the Senate and the Roman people, but in fact he remained in complete control. The Senate gave him the title Augustus, which means "revered" (honored). Historians call him Rome's first emperor.

As ruler of Rome, Augustus encouraged education, art, and literature. He completed grand construction projects, repairing more than 80 ruined temples. "I found Rome brick, and left it marble," he boasted. He also gave Rome its first police force, firefighters, and library.

As emperor, Augustus ruled over 50 million people. He turned eastern kingdoms like Judea and Armenia into Roman provinces. To defend the empire, he pushed its



Bust of Augustus Caesar on display at the Vatican in Rome, Italy



Territory controlled by Rome, c. 117a.d.

borders to natural boundaries: The Rhine and Danube rivers in the north, the Sahara Desert in the south, and the Atlantic Ocean in the west.

This vast empire needed a strong economy. The Romans improved trade routes by

building harbors, canals, and roads. Goods flowed into Rome from throughout the empire and as far away as China. Roman coins made trade easier by providing a single system of currency (money).

But Rome's final expansion brought new problems. To reform Roman morals, Augustus harshly punished people for being unfaithful to their husbands or wives. To protect the emperor, he established a private army, the Praetorian Guard. In later years, this same Guard sometimes murdered the emperors it was supposed to protect.

Under Roman rule, the Mediterranean world was mostly at peace for 200 years. This period is called the **Pax Romana**, or Roman Peace. But keeping the peace cost the Romans dearly. During Augustus's reign, one rebellion in the east took three years and 100,000 soldiers to put down. Before it was over, a Roman army was completely destroyed.

Later emperors added to the territory controlled by Rome. From Britain to the Red Sea, a single power ruled over the greatest empire the world had ever known. Defending this vast empire became increasingly challenging and costly as time went on.