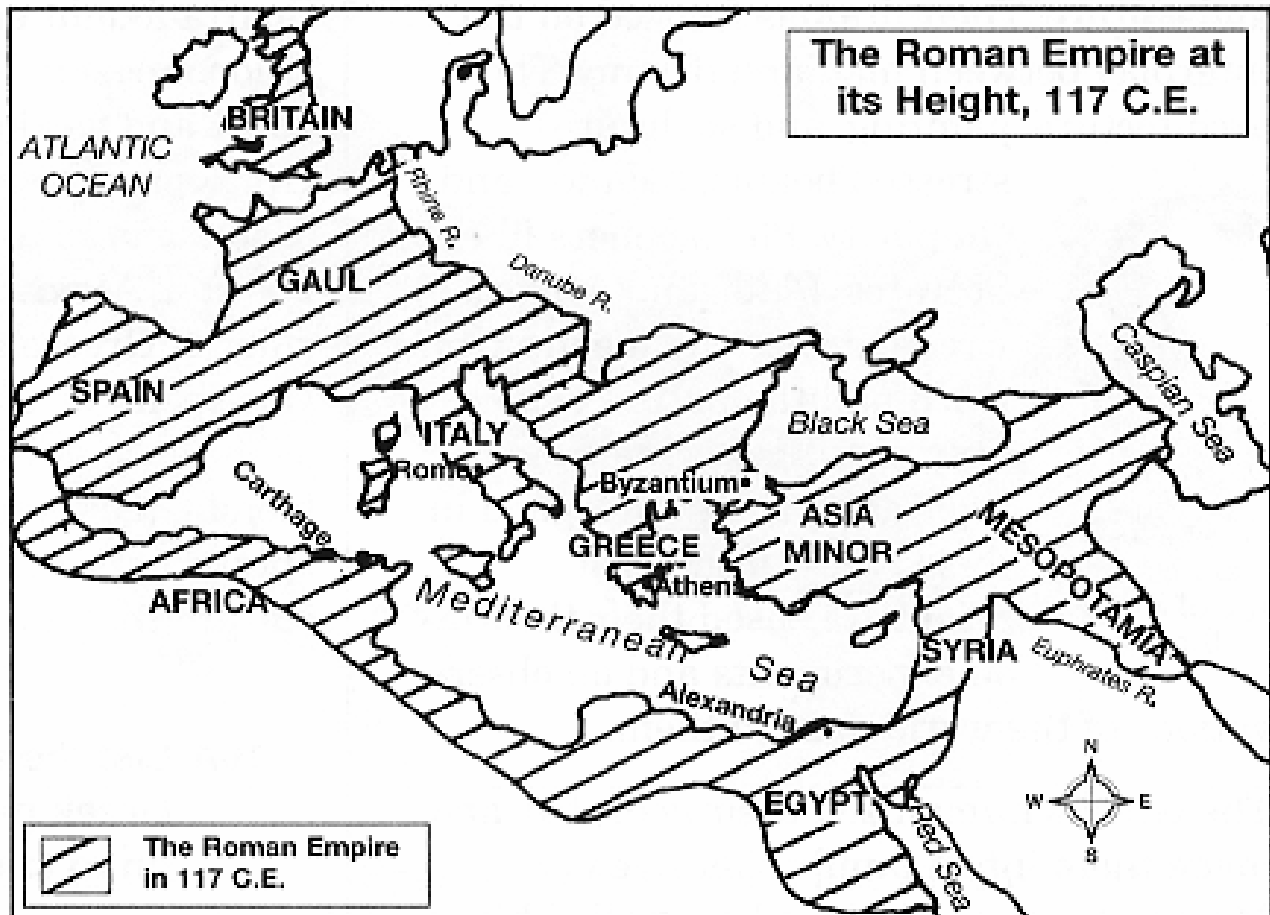


Introduction to Rome: Republic and Empire, 509 BC-476 AD

By 146 BC, the Greek city-states and most of the remains of Alexander the Great's empire had been swallowed up by Rome. In the process, the Romans absorbed much of the Greek culture and scientific achievement.

Rome had begun as a small city on the Italian peninsula. In 509 BC, Rome's citizens expelled their ruler. By 264, they committed the whole of Italy. Roman expansion was briefly halted in 216 by General Hannibal of Carthage. Hannibal with his army of elephants invaded Italy and threatened to destroy Rome. But Roman troops finally defeated Hannibal. In 146, they burned Carthage and this gave them control of the western Mediterranean. The conquest of Greece and Macedonia had secured the eastern Mediterranean. The lands around the sea were the cores of Rome's empire, though later generals would extend its boundaries north and east.



Rome began as a **republic**. There were two classes of citizens: the aristocratic **patricians** and the majority of citizens, the **plebians**. Both groups had some civic rights, but only the patricians could be elected to office. Rome's government was divided into executive and legislative branches. Two **Consuls** headed the executive branch. The Senate dominated the legislature. Its 300 patrician members, who were elected for life, advised the Consuls and debated foreign policy and legislation. In 494 BC, a revolt by the plebians increased their political power and established the principle that all free citizens were protected by the laws.

Rome's military success was based on its well-organized and highly disciplined army. At first, when most Romans were small farmers, all male citizens served as soldiers. But military conquests changed that. Thousands of conquered people were brought as slaves to Rome and replaced the paid workers. At the same time, many small farmers lost their lands to great landowners who also used slave labor. Rome's swelling population of the poor and unemployed now provided army recruits.

These new soldiers were loyal to the generals who paid them, not to the state. Powerful generals used their soldiers to gain political control. The most important was **Julius Caesar**. After conquering Gaul and Britain, Caesar's army invaded Italy. In 45 BC, he began to rule as dictator for life, but some senators viewed him as a tyrant and murdered him in 44 BC. Caesar's nephew, Octavian, defeated his rivals and made himself Rome's first emperor as **Augustus Caesar** in 27 BC.

Emperor Augustus and the "good emperors" who ruled from 96 to 180 AD reformed the administration of the empire. They appointed capable governors to rule the provinces; fine new roads allowed them to communicate with Rome. Imposed public buildings were constructed and **aqueducts** were built to carry water to the cities. Roman law applied to rich and poor alike and was used across the empire.

The provinces sent luxury items from the East and raw materials to Rome. Italian craftsmen made pottery, cloth, glass, and jewelry for the provinces. The profits of trade and agriculture allowed wealthy Romans to lead comfortable and cultured lives. Most citizens were poor but they were consoled by free grain and public spectacles such as chariot races and gladiator fights.

The period of peace and prosperity between 27 BC and 180 AD is known as the **Pax Romana**—the peace brought by Rome. Literature, art, and science flourished. Latin poets like Virgil and Horace and historians like Livy celebrated Rome's greatness. Doctors and astronomers developed theories based on the observations made earlier by the Greeks and Egyptians.

But by 200, the Roman Empire was threatened from inside and out. Christianity was spreading, especially among poor city folk. Christians refused to fight in the army or honor Roman gods (including the emperor who was viewed as a god). They were widely persecuted and even though their numbers were small, their influence was considerable. By 392, Christianity was so widespread that it became the official religion of the empire.

After 192, emperors were appointed by the army. Most of them ruled only briefly. Army factions fought each other constantly. This internal fighting disrupted trade and industry and destroyed harvests and farms.

To make matters worse, Germanic groups whom the Romans called **barbarians** began to threaten the empire. Rome's army was too divided, and its borders too long to be defensible. Emperor **Diocletian** recognized that it was impossible for one man to rule such a vast area and appointed separate rulers for the eastern and western provinces (the empire was formally divided into two halves in 395). In 330, Emperor Constantine moved the capital to the Greek city of Byzantium, which was easier to defend than Rome. The city of Rome was finally conquered in 476, but the eastern half of the empire survived for another 1000 years.

Questions:

1. How did the Romans use cultural diffusion to add to their greatness?

2. What areas were included in the Roman Empire?

3. How did the patricians have a great deal of political power in the Roman republic?

4. How did the Plebeians receive equal protection under the law of Rome?

5. Why was the Roman army able to achieve military success?

6. Why was Julius Caesar a powerful Roman ruler?

7. How did Augustus reform the Roman Empire?

8. Why was the Pax Romana considered the highest point in Roman history?

9. How did the spread of Christianity disrupt the Roman Empire?

10. Why did Diocletian split the Roman Empire into eastern and western provinces?
