

PERIODS OF ROMAN EXPANSION

The growth of Rome from a republic to an empire took place over 500 years. The story has four major periods.

The First Period of Expansion The first period of expansion, or becoming larger, began in 509 B.C.E. At this time, the Romans drove the last Etruscan king out of power, and Rome became a republic.

The Romans wanted to protect their borders and to gain more land. This led to a series of wars. During the next 245 years, the Romans fought one enemy after another. They conquered their Latin neighbors in central Italy. They also defeated their old rulers, the Etruscans.

Wisely, the Romans eventually made allies, or friends, of their former enemies. By 264 B.C.E., Rome and its allies controlled all of the Italian peninsula. However, expansion came at a price. The Romans had to build and maintain a full-time, professional army at great expense. Also, most soldiers were plebeians, and not patricians. Their resentment of this fact led to civil unrest.

The Second Period of Expansion Rome's growth threatened another great power, the city of Carthage (KAR-thidge), in North Africa. During the second period of expansion, from 264 to 146 B.C.E., Rome and Carthage fought three major wars. Through these wars, Rome gained control of North Africa, much of Spain, and the island of Sicily. Roman armies also conquered Macedonia and Greece.

The Punic Wars, as the struggle against Carthage is known, had a great impact on Rome. For fifteen years a Carthaginian General - Hannibal - rampaged through Italy, destroying several Roman armies and countless farms. During the turmoil, many small farms were bought up by wealthy landowners who began managing huge estates called latifundia. Landless, unemployed plebeians began flooding the city of Rome.

The Third Period of Expansion During the third period of expansion, from 146 to 44 B.C.E., Rome came to rule the entire Mediterranean world. In the east, Rome took control of Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt. In the west, the Roman general Julius Caesar conquered much of Gaul (modern-day France).

Even as Rome expanded, there was trouble at home. Increasing numbers of slaves were brought into the empire. Rather than hiring free citizens, wealthy landowners used slave labor. This greatly increased the number of unemployed.

Roman politicians and generals began taking advantage of the huge number of unemployed in Rome by providing them with food, jobs, and housing in exchange for their votes, corrupting the Republic. Roman soldiers also looked increasingly to their generals for money and land, and not to the Roman Senate. This meant that the armies were more loyal to their commanders than to the Republic.

Proud Romans now called the Mediterranean "our sea." But the republic was in trouble. **Civil wars** divided the city. Roman generals used their power to become **dictators**. They set their armies against the power of the Senate. Caesar himself ruled as a dictator for life until he was assassinated in 44 B.C.E.

The men who murdered Caesar thought they were saving the power of the Senate. However, several more years of civil war followed. Then Caesar's grandnephew, Octavian, seized total power. The Senate named him Augustus, or "honored one." Rome was now an empire governed

by one supreme ruler.

The Fourth Period of Expansion The fourth period of expansion began with the start of the empire. It lasted until 14 C.E. The first emperor, Augustus, added a great deal of new territory by pushing the borders of the empire all the way to natural boundaries, like rivers, to make it easier to defend. Later emperors added more territory. At its height, the Roman Empire stretched from the island of Britain in the northwest to the Black Sea in the east.

During this final phase of expansion, Rome would reach its greatest level of power. However, the Republic had died, and was replaced by emperors who had absolute power.