

The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire

At its high point the Roman Empire controlled all the lands around the Mediterranean Sea. The Empire extended from Britain and Spain to the west to Turkey in the east, southward through Syria and Israel, and included the entire Mediterranean coast of Africa. The area of the ancient Roman Empire is home to thirty countries today. Even though the Romans had a technologically advanced civilization for their time, of course they did not possess the communication and transportation we have today. Eventually the empire collapsed because the amount of territory became too large for one ruling body to govern and control.



The city of Rome, now at the heart of the country of Italy, had its beginnings around 1,000 BCE, about 3,000 years ago. A group of people known as Latins settled along the Tiber River. Historians do not know where the Latin people originally came from. As nearby Latin small towns grew in size they eventually came together to form the city of Rome. Rome was ruled by a king.

By 264 BCE Rome defeated other tribes including the Etruscans, Gauls, Samnites, and Greek city-states and controlled the Italian entire peninsula. Their civilization had already come in contact with the advanced Greeks and Romans adopted many of the Greek ways. At that time another great empire ruled the coast of Africa, the Carthaginian Empire. Soon these two empires clashed for control of trade in the Mediterranean region in a series of three wars, known as the Punic Wars, lasting one hundred years. The Romans needed to develop a navy in order to fight the Carthaginians. When Romans finally conquered Carthage they then controlled Spain and North Africa. In 168 BCE Romans conquered the state of Macedonia in northern Greece and by 146 BCE Rome controlled the entire Greek peninsula. Rome now ruled the Mediterranean region.

By 150 CE Rome was at the height of its power but in the middle of the third century CE civil wars erupted between rival generals, the Persians attacked from the east and the Germans attacked from the north. However the Roman Empire survived, ruled by harsh emperors who imposed high taxes. This series of emperors retained control over the empire until 408 CE when the Goths from present day Germany conquered the city of Rome. The last Roman emperor was defeated in 476 AD and the empire was divided into many small kingdoms.