

U3A

History of Political Power Series

Course 4

The Romans

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THE ROMANS

At its greatest extent, the Roman Empire stretched from Britain in the west to the Persian Gulf in the east; from South Russia in the north to Egypt in the south. The course will indicate some of the features of power and its development within this diverse and complex political entity.

Suggested reading: Dudley, D., Roman Society, 1970, or any general history of Rome.

<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/oct/02/mary-beard-why-ancient-rome-matters>

READING LIST.

Cæsar, *The Civil War*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1967.

Crawford, M., *The Roman Republic*, Hassocks, Harvester, 1978.

Grant, M., *History of Rome*, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London, 1978.

Scullard, H.H., *From the Gracchi to Nero*, Methuen, London, 1976.

Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1980.

<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/oct/02/mary-beard-why-ancient-rome-matters>

Your local public library has many more titles: books on Roman (including military, social and economic) history and works on the Later Empire (early Byzantium) would be especially useful for the purposes of this course. Books on the China of this period and the Silk Road would also be useful.

ROMAN ORIGINS

We must now go back in our chronology to the early Iron Age, just subsequent to the disturbances caused by "the peoples of the sea", or the collapse of the Bronze Age cultures, to look at developments in the Western Mediterranean. Our evidence for the earlier period is very scanty, with the written histories of the ancient world often conflicting with each other and with the archaeological evidence.

Italy was inhabited by a wide variety of peoples speaking diverse, mostly Indo-European, languages. At around 900 B.C., the Etruscans appeared in Northern Italy and established themselves as an aristocracy over the native population: their origin is unknown. As was so often the case in the Ancient World, a numerically-weak but militarily [or otherwise] strong group of incomers was able to establish itself as an élite and dominate the local communities politically, ideologically, socially, and economically, usually by successfully replacing the traditional élite. But the indigenous culture remained intact and evolved, with influence from the dominant élite. The ancient tradition was that the Etruscans came from the East, perhaps Lydia: their language has no known affiliates, and only short inscriptions can be read with any certainty. Support for the Eastern origins of the Etruscans lies in the developed state of their religious systems, town-planning, engineering skills, and their use of the arch, otherwise unknown outside Mesopotamia. Many scholars argue that the Etruscan culture was a local development, but it is debatable whether archaeology can demonstrate that the ruling élite and their unique language, together with other distinctive aspects of their culture, were locally derived. Certainly, the archaeology of the region appears to show a purely local development of most of the material culture, such as pottery-styles. The question must remain open. The focus of Etruscan settlement appears to have been mineral deposits, especially of iron. The Etruscans were an urbanizing people with a distinctive religion and highly developed complex systems for foretelling the future. Twelve of the Etruscan cities (not always the same twelve) formed a federation which may have been more

religious than political: the Etruscan foundations were independent city-states. The Etruscans traded with the Greeks, and there early appears to have been a considerable Greek influence on Etruscan culture.

The Punic cities (states?) appear to have intruded into the western Mediterranean in the very early Iron Age (around 900 B.C.) One of their entrepôts, Carthage, became an economic power in its own right, dominating the western Mediterranean region. But many Punic entrepôts remained in competition (and sometimes in alliance) with Carthage.

Sardinia, with its unique Bronze-Age culture, appears to have maintained its cultural distinctiveness well into the Iron Age despite incursions and colonization by the Phœnicians, Carthaginians, Greeks, and others.

At c. 750 B.C., Greek colonization began in the Western Mediterranean, and co-incidentally Rome, at first a small collection of agricultural villages (beginning as independent communities of shepherds on each of the seven hills), was founded. Carthage was founded a little earlier, as a colony of Tyre, being a part of the general Phœnician expansion in the West. As our story begins, we find three major economic cores of power in the Western Mediterranean: the Etruscans, the Carthaginians, and the Greeks. The Etruscans generally found common cause with the Carthaginians against the Greeks, as Carthaginian expansion by sea and Etruscan expansion on land brought them both into conflict with the Greeks. The Western half of Italy was inhabited by Italic peoples; the Etruscans were dominant in the North-West; immediately south of Etruria were the Latin peoples, who had a common linguistic and religious identity; to the south of Latium were other Italic peoples especially on the mountain spine of the Italian peninsular, however, the Etruscans colonized the Bay of Naples and its hinterland, and Greek colonies were spread around the coast, and also dominated Eastern Sicily; Carthage colonized the African coast, Southern Spain and, in conflict with the Greeks, the South of France and Western Sicily. Rome was founded on the semi-periphery of all three civilizations.

As the Etruscans expanded, Rome became a focus for trade between the three dominant cultures. Rome seems to have come under Etruscan rule c. 616 B.C., as a part of a general Etruscan push southwards which was to bring them into conflict with the Greeks of

Cumae. The political institutions of Early Latin Rome seem to have been based on an elective kingship, a Council of Elders, and an Assembly: the basic political institutions of the Indo-European-speaking peoples. There is some academic controversy surrounding the meaning of the term “king” in the Mediterranean political landscape in general and in the specific Roman instance in particular. The Etruscan ascendancy at Rome involved urbanization, drainage and other engineering works, temple-building with the introduction of some aspects of Etruscan religion, and the establishment of Rome as a trade centre. The Etruscans had adopted a form of the Greek alphabet, and the Roman alphabet was formed from a combination of the Etruscan and other Greek alphabets. One of the later “kings” of Rome, Servius Tullius, (it is unclear whether he was an Etruscan or a Latin) established the army with a basis of middle-class infantrymen, on the Greek model. This Etruscanized Rome was dominant over the other Latin cities. Rome [traditionally] expelled its Etruscan kings in 510 B.C., the same year that Athens expelled its tyrants, and the Roman Republic was born. At around this time the Etruscans were threatened from the north by “Celtic” peoples, the Gauls, who settled south of the Alps. Rome had from the beginning been a mixed society, with Etruscan and Sabine elements and probably others adding to the basic Latin stock, and it now began to develop a “mixed constitution”, with three major components: the Magistrates, the Senate, and the People. Trade declined, this not being a concern of the dominant landowning aristocracy, the Senators. At around the same time as the battle of Salamis, probably not a coincidence, the Carthaginians attacked the Greeks of Sicily with Etruscan support: again, the Greeks were as successful as at Salamis; a few years later, in 474 B.C., the Western Greeks defeated the Etruscans, and the decline of Etruscan power began to accelerate. It is at around this time that a war between Rome and some of the other Latin cities ended with a treaty from which Rome emerges as the dominant partner.

It is often suggested that the Romans exhibited consistent aggression against other peoples in their pursuit of empire. This view ignores the violent nature of most ancient societies, both in their internal relationships and their relations with other communities. The “Celts”, for example, were head-hunters whose aristocracy gloried in warfare. Other peoples were equally aggressive and bloodthirsty.

The act of initiating hostilities with another state was contrary to Roman religious belief. Rome began its career of domination as a small and relatively weak community constantly forced to defend itself against aggression from its powerful neighbours acting as confederacies. Rome conquered the world in self-defence! Rome's eventual dominance was based on superior manpower numbers and the judicious use of treaties in which each individual enemy city was dealt with separately, which placed a premium on the graded granting of Roman citizenship rights to suitably Romanized peoples.

During the first few centuries of Rome's existence, Rome was on the periphery of three cores of power: Etruria, Magna Græcia, and Carthage. All were economic, rather than political, powers. Magna Græcia and Carthage were maritime powers; Etruria was a land power with a strong maritime capability. Carthage depended on mercenaries from its subject peoples for its military manpower, and made war for purely economic motives. The Etruscans, although militarily strong, do not appear to have been especially warlike, and often depended on allies and mercenaries. The Greeks, as we have seen, were citizen-soldiers whose military skills were honed by constant fighting amongst themselves but, buttressed by their belief in their own excellence, the various Greek communities rarely united against outside foes. Rome learned from all of its powerful neighbours.

ROMAN SOCIETY

Fundamentally, Roman society was organized like that of the Greeks, the differences being that, at about the same time that the Greeks disassociated their social organizations from their political organizations, the Romans systematically incorporated their social organizations into their political system, and that, against the Greek tendency to exclusiveness, the Romans consistently included new groups into their body politic. As with the Greeks, the broadest division of Roman society was into "tribes". Each tribe was divided into a number of *curia*: the early Roman *curia* (Greek *trittyes*, "third") was at once the basis for both military and political organization. Each *curia* was composed of a number of clans (Greek *phratry*, "brotherhood", Latin *gens*), groups of families with a common name, claiming a common ancestry: both plebian (commoner) families and

patrician (aristocratic) families existed within the same *gentes*; the *gentiles*, the members of *gens*, unlike their Greek equivalents, did not worship their ancestors. The patricians (*patricii*) were the aristocrats of Rome, originally those qualified by birth to hold magistracies and the more important religious offices: their political influence declined with their numbers; the Emperors were empowered to admit new members to the patriciate. The plebians (*plebs*) were the general body of Roman citizens, and were originally debarred from the Senate, religious colleges, magistracies, and intermarriage with patricians. Even so, recent scholarship has had trouble defining the difference between plebians and patricians. The *equites* (knights) were originally the cavalry units of the legions, drawn from persons who could afford to keep a horse: a landed interest, they also formed the commercial class, and under the Empire, held important posts in the civil administration; the *equites* could be of plebian or patrician origin. During the Republican period the *plebs* gained political equality with the *patricii*. To summarize, Roman political organization was class-based, and class was a function of birth, but although the social prestige of the patricians endured for many centuries, the political distinctions between classes was gradually eroded.

The earliest Roman law code was the Twelve Tables, not surviving in its entirety, which codified and published customary law: it was supposed, in antiquity, to have been compiled subsequent to a mid-5th century B.C. embassy to Athens for the purpose of studying Athenian political institutions. The publication of the laws, as always in the ancient world, was an attack on the patrician privilege of the knowledge and interpretation of the laws: when the law is written down, everyone who can read knows what the law is, in any particular. Under the law, the head of the family, the *paterfamilias*, had the power of life and death over all members of the family, including wives, offspring (even if adult), slaves, and other dependents.

The various magistrates conducted the day to day business of the state, and were, as in Greece, generally elected for one year or less at a time - a safeguard against any individual gaining too much power by prolonged occupancy of any particular office. As the magistracies involved varying degrees of responsibility, by the time of the early

Principate a person intent on a political career was obliged to hold each of these positions in ascending order of importance. Some of these steps were not compulsory under the Republic. The pattern (called the *cursus honorum*) was, after preliminary military service, vigintivirate, military tribune, quaestorship, aedileship, tribune of the *plebs*, praetorship, consulship, and finally, the censorship. This provision ensured that only experienced and mature persons could succeed to positions of high authority. The vigintivirate were a number of civil magistrates who were responsible for a variety of juridical and administrative functions, including the mint, road maintenance, prisons, and the nocturnal peace. The military tribunes were the senior officers of the legions. The quaestors, aged about 30, were financial officers; when they worked under a senior magistrate, they often held military command under him: at the end of their service they were enrolled in the Senate. The tribunes of the *plebs* were charged with the defence of the lives and property of the plebians; they were protected by an oath of the plebians to uphold their personal inviolability: the tribunes had the right of veto over any actions by magistrates (including other tribunes), laws, and elections. The aediles were responsible for public buildings, archives, streets, traffic regulations, public order in religious matters, the games, the water supply, corn supply, and weights and measures. The praetors were generals, were responsible for the administration of justice in Rome, dealt with lawsuits involving foreigners, and governed provinces. The consuls were the supreme civil and military magistrates: there were always two, and were sometimes likened to the Twin Kingship of Sparta. The censors, again, always two, controlled public morality, the leasing of public property, and the official list of citizens. The dictator, a very rarely instigated office proposed by the Senate and nominated by a consul, was an office borrowed from other Latin states, and was a temporary magistracy in times of crisis, holding undivided authority over the state for a maximum period of six months. The later dictatorships of Sulla and Caesar were unconstitutional. The Senate, originally the council of the kings, was the governing body of Rome, recruited mainly from the sons of senators who had held the quaestorship: it advised the magistrates, validated laws, regulated coinage, controlled religion, and determined foreign policy. Being generally excluded from trade, the senators were predominantly a landlord class. Although the Senate lost its independence under the Principate, its formal functions continued and expanded.

The basis of Roman society was the family, dominated by its male head, the *paterfamilias*, whilst he lived, unlike his Greek counterpart, who generally retired as head of the family at age 59, or when his son reached full maturity at about 32 years of age. The *paterfamilias* had total control, and the power of life and death, over his family and was the priest of the family religion whilst he lived. Roman politics was essentially a competition between families for dominance, and a family would work, generation after generation, to achieve improved status; the individual was of little importance: the carefully-planned rise of the family of the Emperor Vespasian from obscure origins (possibly even slavery) to senatorial rank is a case in point. The key ideals to which a Roman aspired were virtue, glory, honour, and fame: these were originally public, political, concepts with no ethical content before the time when Greek philosophy began to influence Roman thought.

Also important to the Roman political process was the client system. This was a personal relationship wherein persons put themselves under the protection of a *patronus*, who would provide legal support, lend money, give advice, even provide daily food, and act as ward to the client's children. In return the *clientes* gave the *patronus* respect and social and political support. Freed slaves and their descendants were automatically clients, whole provincial communities became the clients of victorious generals, as did their veteran soldiers. The *clientela* of powerful persons formed a state within the state.

Social power in Rome was concentrated in the persons of the senators, who were wealthy, had held the higher magistracies, and had a large *clientia*, and their families. Political power was concentrated in the Senate (under the principate, the Emperor was a Senator). Military power was held by the consuls (the Emperor was commander-in-chief and usually one of the consuls). Economic power was, in trade and commercial activity, largely vested in the *equites*, who were frequently the offspring of Senators, while the Senate was a concentration of the wealthy landowning class. The ideological power of the Roman state derived from the high status of the Senate and from the state religion. The combination of the *cursus honorum* and the client system militated against a

movement towards democracy. The Stoic virtues of resolution, fortitude, devotion to duty, and indifference to pleasure, together with its concept of a world community bound together by a natural law which underlay the variety of local custom, was well in accord with Roman traditional values and gave them an intellectual validity, thus helping in the assimilation of Greek ways in general to Roman culture.

POLITICAL POWER

Rome began its career of conquest with a series of small wars about which we know little, even of the causes. It is in the treaties which resulted from the wars that we see the nature of the foreign policies that resulted in the Empire. The earliest known of these treaties (493 B.C.) involved the smaller Latin peoples, and guaranteed a permanent peace, mutual assistance, an agreement not to call in foreign forces for support in disputes between the signatories, and legal provisions to regulate private economic contracts: the joint activities of the parties were to be directed by Rome. During the 5th century B.C., (at the time that China was just entering the Iron Age) Rome made systematic progress against its enemies, planting Latin colonies and establishing garrisons at strategic points. Internal and external problems (the plebs' struggle for political rights and the sack of Rome by the Gauls in 390 B.C.) preoccupied Rome for some time, but after 360 B.C. Rome again began to expand, and had almost completed the conquest of the Italian peninsular by 210 B.C.

Most of these wars were fought against powerful confederacies: allies had to be kept loyal, potential enemies humoured, large armies had to be kept in the field, problems of supply, strategy, and tactics had to be solved, and stable treaty settlements had to be achieved. The advantage and political dominance of the Roman people was Rome's policy at all times.

The Roman Senate dealt with each individual enemy people separately, according to the pragmatic needs of each case: some had their fortifications destroyed, others only had their leaders punished, and others lost territory, which was usually colonized by Roman

citizens or Latin allies. Generally, the former enemy communities were forbidden to engage in commerce, political counsel, or even marriage between themselves: all such links, if external to the particular community, were to be directly with Rome. Roman citizenship therefore became a highly-prized status; even the private rights of Roman citizens (*civitas sine suffragio*, civil rights, the rights to marriage and commerce without the vote) were a sought-after privilege. Full Roman citizenship could be granted to a whole community, sometimes after a probation period, or to an individual under certain circumstances, such as migration to Rome, or upon joining a Roman colony. The subject communities were autonomous locally, but had to supply troops to Rome at need. Confiscated land might be given to Roman citizens in small parcels, used for the special purposes of the State, rented out by the State (sometimes to the original owners), or taken for the foundation of colonies.

The use of “colonies” had a long history: the Phoenicians had established a trading empire on this basis; the Greeks had tried to solve their population problems by founding new communities; the Athenians had established “colonies” at economically strategic points, and planted military “colonies” on the territories of allies with suspect loyalties; Alexander had linked the diversity of his empire with Greek colonies whose purpose was at once cultural, commercial, and military. Rome used its colonies as a political device. **Colonies of veteran troops can hold down subject populations, guard perilous frontiers, facilitate the expansion of trade, provide local centres of government, breed new recruits for the army, and extend a culture, especially when linked by good communications.** The Roman roads, supported by water-borne transport, provided the communications link. Italy was politically linked directly to Rome, both officially and through the client system and, at a more personal level, the residence of Roman citizens in Italian communities and the residence of Italians in Rome provided direct social links; Italy was physically linked directly to Rome by the roads. The building and maintenance of the roads stimulated the economy in all areas.

The concept that citizenship, suitably graded, could be extended to “other” communities was one of the major political innovations of human history. Citizenship

had hitherto been a function of birthplace or (very rarely) conferred on a foreign individual as an exceptional honour; now it became possible to be a Roman citizen as well as a citizen of one's birthplace. The extension of Roman power had provided the Romans with a wide variety of military skills, engineering skills, and diplomatic skills. When the clash with Carthage triggered the acquisition of an overseas Empire, Rome had the loyalty of most of the Italian communities and the experience to both conquer and govern.

The expanding Roman Empire resulted in an expanding economy which economically linked all parts of the Empire to Rome. The spread of Roman citizens throughout the Empire socially (through family ties, the client system, and other personal relationships) linked all parts of the Roman Empire (and many places beyond) to Rome. The distribution of Roman armed forces throughout the Empire militarily linked all parts of the Roman Empire to Rome. The presence of Roman legions in strategic areas generated economic activity within those areas, and necessitated efficient communications with the capital, generating economic activity throughout the Empire along the communications routes, with Rome as the focus. Contracts to build roads, aqueducts, baths, to supply the army, and other public expenditure expanded and enriched the commercial classes. The spread of Roman civil servants throughout the Empire politically linked all parts of the Roman Empire to Rome. The extension of Roman citizenship to suitably Latinized individuals (and hence to their families) was of major importance in focusing the political loyalties of the provinces on Rome. This "military Keynesianism", by which the central governments' expenditure, mostly on the army and associated matters, was more than recouped by taxes on the consequent increased economic activity, resulted in slow but steady economic growth and generally low inflation for some hundreds of years. Struggles for power and political pre-eminence by war-lords usually left the general population largely unaffected. The *pax Romana* was a reality. The ideological power of the Roman state, resulting from the steady success of its armies and the continuity of its political existence, was immense: the focus of this ideological power was "the city of Rome" itself, and to some extent the entire "Roman" public, rather than any one ethnic community.

Difficulties in maintaining control at the margins of the Empire, caused by the distance between Rome and the frontiers, led Augustus to forbid further expansion. Coincidentally, at around this time (the beginning of the Christian Era [or Common Era]) the Chinese state which had reached roughly its modern territorial boundaries, was engaged in a debate between the proponents of further expansion and those who wished to limit the frontier to the status quo. Despite some fluctuation in the East and the incorporation of Britain within the Empire in 43 A.D., the Augustan frontiers were largely maintained for centuries.

The keys to the stability of the Roman Empire were the direct linkage between Rome and the provinces, militarily, politically, socially, and economically; the efficiency of its government; its willingness to extend the Roman citizenship to suitably Latinized individuals and communities; and the continuity of stable government (even during the interims between Emperors) provided by the Senate and the public officials.

ECONOMIC AND IDEOLOGICAL POWER

The Roman Empire was a core of power on a massive scale. The legions, mostly stationed on the frontiers, linked the outermost regions of the Empire directly to Rome. The communication system which served to maintain contact between the capital and the armies also provided the skeleton of the Roman economic system and the Roman ideological, social and political networks.

Trade prospered for centuries, as the products of the various parts of the Empire were exchanged for each other. Britain, for example, exported the products of the extreme north-west, and the products of Asia could be purchased in Britain. The engine that drove the economic machine was the spending, by the central government, of resources on the building and maintenance of the military infrastructure, an engine that gained increased power from the purchasing strength of the legions and the various government officials

throughout the provinces. As the frontiers stabilized, less new infrastructure was required, and the provinces became increasingly self-governing; economic activity declined with government spending, reducing the tax-base: taxes, of course, rose. Self-sufficiency was the economic ideal of the ancient world, and communities endeavoured to replace expensive imports with locally-produced substitutes, further depressing distance-economic activity. As trade declined, communities increased their efforts to replace imports with local products: grain and other necessities were increasingly produced under conditions of poor economic return: a reverse multiplier effect. The lands to the west and north of the Empire produced little that was in demand within the Empire, and trade across these borders was minimal. The Empire was, however, hungry for the products of the lands to its east: Southern Arabia, Parthia, India, and China; as few of the Empire's products were in demand in these lands, coinage flowed out of the Empire in return for the luxuries of the East, further dampening the Roman economy.

Service in the legions and other factors drained the countryside of peasant manpower, and the land was increasingly given over to large estates owned by a wealthy élite and cultivated by slaves; over time, as the distinction between slaves and impoverished free persons became blurred, this inefficient system gave way to a situation where the cultivators were nominally free but tied to the soil: eventually, there came an attempt to confine all persons to their parents' status and occupation. This was a “mirror” or “avatar” of the Indian Caste system. The decline of the free peasantry, which had begun in peninsular Italy, spread throughout the Empire, depriving the army of its recruiting-base. The ideal of self-sufficiency meant that each estate provided for as much of its requirements as possible, however inefficiently, a circumstance which further curtailed trade.

The various magistracies were unpaid positions undertaken as a public duty or from political ambition, and occupancy of these offices had originally been a sign of an individual's wealth and high status; over time, the financial obligations of office became so burdensome that it became difficult to find anyone to accept these offices; increasingly, the responsibility was forced onto an already overtaxed middle class, whilst

the wealthy and influential escaped to their estates and shut themselves in, protected by their private armies. Government began to break down. Urban centres began to decline. Small states began to emerge within the erstwhile Empire.

The Roman takeover of the Hellenistic East resulted in a Græco-Roman culture which overlaid the multitude of purely local cultures with a veneer of common Greek-inspired education combined with Roman practice: the dominant language of the West was Latin; the dominant language of the East remained Greek. Athens, still the "school of Hellas", and other centres of philosophy, such as Rhodes and Alexandria, became the fountainheads of an education which was common to the dominant classes of the Empire. As the centre of political gravity shifted increasingly eastwards, where the wealth was, the Empire began to divide into a Latin-speaking West and a Greek-speaking East, culturally as well as linguistically distinct.

The legions had carried Roman religion to the furthest frontiers, incorporating local beliefs as they did so: the worship of Rome itself (Roma Mater) and, in time, the Emperor, was an ideologically unifying factor within the Empire. Following the incorporation of the Hellenistic East within the Empire a number of mystery religions which were based on a dying god, and including resurrection and personal salvation, were introduced to Rome: Mithraism, a later development of Persian Zoroastrianism, became especially current in the legions, whilst a form of Jewish fundamentalism called Christianity gained currency amongst the uneducated civil population. The Christian Church, which had begun under the early Principate, because of its illegality had been forced to adopt a cell-structure and government which mirrored the civil authority, under a hierarchy of deacons and bishops who were elected by their local congregations on the basis of their reputed moral purity and their knowledge of the Scriptures. As the civil authority became increasingly ineffectual, the church became a defacto alternative government. With the adoption by Constantine of Christianity as the state religion, Church and State became intertwined, to the disgust of the traditional, educated aristocracy, to whom Christianity was a farrago of illogical superstitions: the authority of the traditional ruling classes was further eroded as they withdrew, or were forced from,

positions of authority by religious prejudice. Urban decline, especially in the West, left the **elected** bishops of the cathedral towns as the main civil authorities, introducing the notion that persons in authority should conform to conventional moral values. Shocked by the capture of Rome by the Goths under Alaric in 410 A.D., the pagans blamed the event on the Christian denial of the ancient gods, whilst the Christians blamed the intransigent paganism of the old aristocracy. St. Augustine of Hippo, in his major philosophical and theological work *The City of God*, achieved a synthesis of Roman Stoicism and Neo-Platonism with Christianity, thus making Christianity an intellectually respectable faith for educated persons.

From the beginning of the Principate, the Emperors had been dependant on the favour of the legions for their power, although this fact had been at first obscured by the confused nature of political events. While the legions had been predominantly drawn from the Roman, Latin, or at least Italian peasantry, the ideological, social and political power of the Roman Emperor and Senate had kept the loyalties of the legions focused on Rome; with the decline of the peasantry of peninsular Italy, the legions were increasingly recruited from the provinces, or even from beyond the frontiers, amongst peoples whose first loyalties were local: non-Romans began to contend for the rulership of the Empire. More and more often, military security drew the Emperors to various flashpoints of conflict around the Empire; since, as the Senate declined in importance, the government was where the Emperor was, Rome lost its status as the central place, the core, of the Empire. Eventually, Constantine, for strategic and economic reasons, established a new capital at the former Athenian colony of Byzantium, and Rome became just another provincial city, left with only the ideological power of its ancient name and fame.

The peoples of the northern, north-eastern and western semi-peripheries, warrior-agriculturalists and pastoralists, were increasingly Romanized. Christianity, even if often unorthodox in form, had replaced the traditional religious practices. As all free male residents within the Empire had been Roman citizens, with the attendant benefits, since 212 BCE, envious peoples from beyond the frontiers wanted to be Roman citizens as well. Pushed by even more warlike peoples, these Christianized, Romanized, peoples

began to move over the frontiers, sometimes invited in and given land to act as frontier-guards by a central government increasingly hard-put to find tax-revenue to pay the legions, sometimes by force. These, mostly Germanic, incomers, Goths, Visigoths, Ostrogoths, Vandals, Lombards, Franks, Alans, etc., were paid in land for their peoples; any cash payments went to their chiefs: the resultant decline in the distribution of government spending in the frontier regions combined with the unsettled conditions of the times to further depress the economy. By 500 A.D., the Empire was effectively confined (with some fluctuations) to the Greek-speaking East with its capital at Byzantium, and Western Europe was under the rule of a variety of (usually Christian) Germanic kingdoms.

RECAPITULATION

In the past few courses we have scanned briefly through [probably] over 4.5 million years or so of human “history”, with the accent on developments in the western world. The first important thing that comes to mind is that cores of power occur where economic opportunity is combined with social instability, creating a perceived need for new forms of authoritative control, and further, cores of power destabilize their semi-periphery, engendering change on the semi-periphery; in other words, technological change is mediated by environmental factors which give rise to economic factors which call forth a political response. Another feature of human history is that cores of power arise as a consequence of a rich and varied food-source; a diverse agricultural base which supports a numerous small-farmer class on which a value-added economy – and military recruitment - can be based is a manifestation of this factor. In addition to all this, we can perceive a consistent tendency towards the expansion of political units with centralized control which is constantly opposed by a tendency to assert local autonomies.

Social instability arises from population-growth, which causes human groups to attempt to differentiate themselves from other groups, to discover a unique communal identity; at around 60,000 B.P., population growth in Eurasia – outside Western Europe - was closely followed by a rapid growth in technology: further creative and technological spurts

appear to have been related to population increases combined with cultural diversity. Conversely, where technology-loss has been exhibited by human groups, it has been associated with cultural isolation. Horticulture and stock-raising were a response to the expansion of the total human population as well as environmental change, and they themselves altered the human environment to call forth such technologies as pottery and metal-working: these economic changes created the conditions for other changes in technology which were also changes in the human environment: urbanization, writing, different social structures, and new political forms. Totemism and animism accompanied by shamans in their rôle as interpreters of the spirit world gave way to formalized religion controlled by a priesthood; the informal political authority of exceptional individuals gave way to kingship; the political authority of the priesthood gave way to the political authority of kings with sacred attributes and religious functions; in some cases, kingship gave way to other forms of government which distributed religious and political power more widely through the community. Always change generated a multiplicity of further changes. Always there was a tendency to revert to simpler and older forms of organization, or to represent even radical change as such a reversion. Communities which were reluctant or unable to respond to change were conquered and often lost their communal identity altogether. Conservative Egypt, with its peculiar geographic position which to some extent insulated it from the rest of the world, alone maintained its community identity, despite having been successively conquered, occupied and ruled by the Hyksos, Assyrians, Persians, Macedonians, and Romans. The Chinese region went through processes similar to those of the Middle East, from an original agricultural revolution on the Yellow River to a shifting of cores of power as various peoples gained political control in the region or parts of it; the region was also always under the constant threat of intermittent incursions of peoples from the semi-periphery and periphery. Not having suffered the political, economic, and cultural collapse which was occasioned in the Near East by the incursions of the "peoples of the sea", the Chinese region developed slowly, retaining and refining the Bronze Age bureaucracies and political forms and entering the Iron Age much later (c. 500 B.C.) than the West.

Social change made traditional, customary, modes of dealing with social problems inappropriate, and created distrust of the orally-transmitted knowledge of those individuals who had traditionally given legal judgment: written publication of the laws, from Sumer to Rome, was always, in origin, a response to the larger size of the political community and an attack on the privileges of dominant élites. But written laws introduced a new form of inflexibility into social relations, as they were difficult to change, for religious and social reasons, and resisted the possibility of softening penalties in accordance with particular circumstances. When a community was conquered, or otherwise taken-over by another community, the right to remain under its own laws was a much sought-after condition of the following settlement. This resulted in a multiplicity of legal structures within large polities and empires, and immense administrative, social, and economic confusion. The great edifice of Roman Law was the first successful attempt to deal with this problem, and has been of enduring significance.

It would appear from our survey that developed economies are only successful when they are expanding. Hunter-gatherer economies are *apparently* more-or-less stable, dependent on environmental conditions, but the rapid spread of humanity over the globe indicates that even this basic economy is expansionary. The price of economic stagnation has always been military defeat and/or political and ideological eclipse, and sometimes community extinction. The "Golden Age" of Rome was characterized by slow, steady economic growth; the disintegration of Roman power – in Western Europe - was characterized by economic stagnation and regression. This argument is valid for all of the communities and empires that we have discussed.

Military power has see-sawed between the dominance of cavalry (necessarily an aristocratic form of warfare) and infantry, which is often a democratizing form of warfare. New cavalry technologies defeated old infantry techniques until new infantry techniques rendered those cavalry technologies obsolete. Minoan Crete and classical Athens demonstrated the potential importance of naval power, but most empires were land-based and depended on land communications. The "King's Roads" of Persia gave way to the labour-intensive, and therefore economically stimulating, Roman roads.

Political power has fluctuated with military power. As citizenship has, through most of our period, been a function of a person's military standing, and the citizen had to supply his own military equipment, a successful cavalry power has tended to aristocratic forms of government, while a successful infantry power has tended towards more popular, even democratic, forms of government. Military power has always been dependent on rural manpower, and this military resource has always been sensitive to social and economic change. The stability of any political form has rested on continued military and economic success, as well as the strength of the community's ideology, or value-belief system.

For most of our period, the most obvious form of ideology has been religion. Belief in the superiority of a community's gods went hand-in-hand with belief in the superiority of a community's manners and customs. Such belief was enhanced by the success of a community in competition with other communities. The long-term and geographically wide success of Rome engendered a broad acceptance of Roman religion alongside the continued observance of local religious practices. The freedom with which Rome granted its citizenship to individuals and communities not of Roman parentage, together with the social, economic, and political advantages involved in the possession of Roman citizenship, was an important factor in the ideological unification of the Empire. Roman law, in the code involving foreigners, the *ius gentium*, soon became imbued with Stoic notions of "natural law" and the essential equality in human dignity of all mankind, and Roman law in its various forms was a powerful influence in the ideological unification of the Empire.

It is conventional to view the ancient world as coming to an end with the death of the last Emperor of the West in 480 A.D., so that this is also the conventional date for the beginning of the mediæval period, which conventionally came to an end with Columbus' discovery of America in 1492: in round figures the mediæval period runs between 500 CE and 1500 CE. When in the next course we approach the mediæval period in Western Europe, we will see a resurgence of the smaller political unit, combined with new military and agricultural technologies and apparent economic stagnation. Over the period

the economy changes its form and strengthens. Christianity is the ideological unifying factor for an enormous area, and Christendom, the Christian Empire, stretches from Greenland in the west, to the easternmost fringes of Byzantine-controlled territory.

But the Roman Empire did not come to an end with the beginning of the mediæval period. In the east, with its capital now Byzantium, the Roman Empire persisted until the later years of what we loosely call “the middle ages”. And in the “Roman East” Christianity became the powerful religious ideology to reinforce the political, military, economic and social ideological power of the Roman Empire until its defeat by the Turks in 1452.