



THIS DAY IN HISTORY

STUDY GUIDE



APR. 21, 753 B.C. : ROME FOUNDED

Biographies, discussion questions, suggested activities and more



ANCIENT ROME

Setting the Stage

Beginning in the eighth century B.C., Ancient Rome grew from a small town on central Italy's Tiber River into an empire that at its peak encompassed most of continental Europe, Britain, much of western Asia, northern Africa and the Mediterranean islands. Among the many legacies of Roman dominance are the widespread use of the Romance languages (Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Romanian) derived from Latin, the modern Western alphabet and calendar and the emergence of Christianity as a major world religion.

After 450 years as a republic, Rome became an empire in the wake of Julius Caesar's rise and fall in the first century B.C. The long and triumphant reign of its first emperor, Augustus, began a golden age of peace and prosperity. By contrast, the empire's decline and fall by the fifth century A.D. was one of the most dramatic implosions in the history of human civilization. About a thousand years after its founding, Rome collapsed under the weight of its own bloated empire, losing its provinces one by one: Britain around 410; Spain and northern Africa by 430. Attila and his brutal Huns invaded Gaul and Italy around 450, further shaking the foundations of the empire. In September 476, a Germanic prince named Odovacar won control of the Roman army in Italy. After deposing the last western emperor, Romulus Augustus, Odovacar's troops proclaimed him king of Italy, bringing an ignoble end to the long, tumultuous history of ancient Rome.

Today, Rome is the capital of Italy and its greater metropolitan area is home to over 4 million people. Rome also encompasses Vatican City, the world's smallest independent country, and the headquarters of the Roman Catholic Church. Rome is famous the world over for its ancient ruins, which include the Colosseum, the Pantheon and the Roman Forum, among many other historic and artistic sites.

Cover photo: Exterior of the Colosseum, photo by Diana Ringo

APR. 21, 753 B.C. ROME FOUNDED



Romulus and Remus Discovered by a Gentle Shepherd, c. 1850

According to tradition, on April 21, 753 B.C., Romulus and his twin brother, Remus, founded Rome on the site where they were suckled by a she-wolf as orphaned infants. Actually, the Romulus and Remus myth originated sometime in the fourth century B.C., and the exact date of Rome's founding was set by the Roman scholar Marcus Terentius Varro in the first century B.C.

According to the legend, Romulus and Remus were the sons of Rhea Silvia, the daughter of King Numitor of Alba Longa. Alba Longa was a mythical city located in the Alban Hills southeast of what would become Rome. Before the birth of the twins, Numitor was deposed by his younger brother Amulius, who forced Rhea to become a vestal virgin so that she would not give birth to rival claimants to his title. However, Rhea was impregnated by the war god Mars and gave birth to Romulus and Remus. Amulius ordered the infants drowned in the Tiber, but they survived and washed ashore at the foot of the Palatine hill, where they were suckled by a she-wolf until they were found by the shepherd Faustulus.

Reared by Faustulus and his wife, the twins later became leaders of a band of young shepherd warriors. After learning their true identity, they attacked Alba Longa, killed the wicked Amulius, and restored their grandfather to the throne. The twins then decided to found a town on the site where they had been saved as infants. They soon became involved in a petty quarrel, however, and Remus was slain by his brother. Romulus then became ruler of the settlement, which was named "Rome" after him.

To populate his town, Romulus offered asylum to fugitives and exiles. Rome lacked women, however, so Romulus invited the neighboring Sabines to a festival and abducted their women. A war then ensued, but the Sabine women intervened to prevent the Sabine men from seizing Rome. A peace treaty was drawn up, and the communities merged under the joint rule of Romulus and the Sabine king, Titus Tatius. Tatius' early death, perhaps perpetrated by Romulus, left the Roman as the sole king again. After a long and successful rule, Romulus died under obscure circumstances. Many Romans believed he was changed into a god and worshipped him as the deity Quirinus. After Romulus, there were six more kings of Rome, the last three believed to be Etruscans. Around 509 B.C., the Roman republic was established.

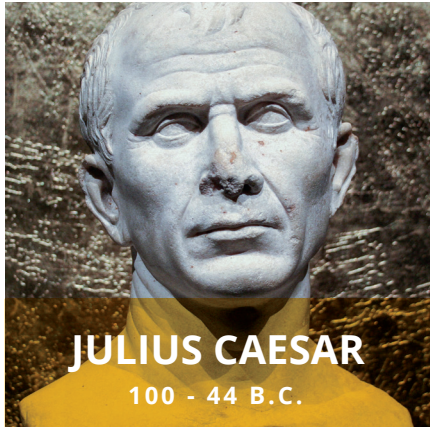
Another Roman foundation legend, which has its origins in ancient Greece, tells of how the mythical Trojan Aeneas founded Lavinium and started a dynasty that would lead to the birth of Romulus and Remus several centuries later. In the Iliad, an epic Greek poem probably composed by Homer in the eighth century B.C., Aeneas was the only major Trojan hero to survive the Greek destruction of Troy. A passage told of how he and his descendants would rule the Trojans, but since there was no record of any such dynasty in Troy, Greek scholars proposed that Aeneas and his followers relocated.

In the fifth century B.C., a few Greek historians speculated that Aeneas settled at Rome, which was then still a small city-state. In the fourth century B.C., Rome began to expand within the Italian peninsula, and Romans, coming into greater contact with the Greeks, embraced the suggestion that Aeneas had a role in the foundation of their great city. In the first century B.C., the Roman poet Virgil developed the Aeneas myth in his epic poem the Aeneid, which told of Aeneas' journey to Rome. Augustus, the first Roman emperor and emperor during Virgil's time, and Julius Caesar, his great-uncle and predecessor as Roman ruler, were said to be descended from Aeneas. □

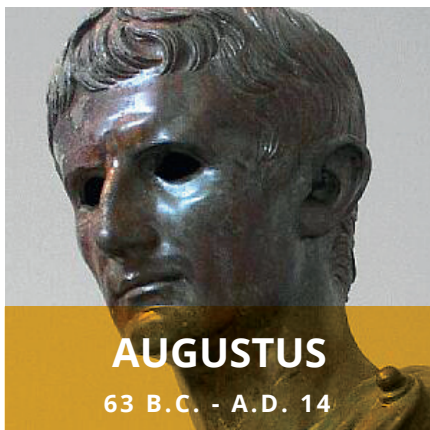
DID YOU KNOW?

The ancient Romans created the world's first shopping mall, apartment buildings, running water, central heating, public welfare system and landfill.

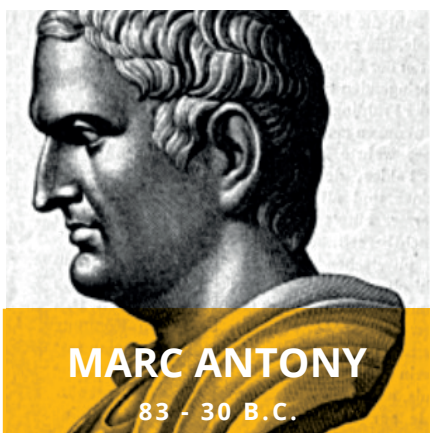
PEOPLE TO KNOW



Julius Caesar was a Roman politician, general and ultimately, dictator, who played a major role in turning the Roman republic into an empire. In the 60s B.C., Caesar began a successful political career, rising through the ranks through bribes and a series of shrewd alliances. From 59 to 53 B.C. he ruled Rome along with the general Pompey and Marcus Licinius Crassus, the richest man in Rome, as part of the First Triumvirate. After the death of Crassus, Caesar turned against Pompey, who had allied himself with the Roman Senate. Caesar emerged victorious from the resulting civil war and, over time, consolidated his power, eventually being declared “dictator for life” in 45 B.C. The next year, he was famously assassinated by a group of senators, who stabbed him 23 times, in the hopes his death would lead to the restoration of the Roman republic. It did not. Along with brilliant military leadership, Caesar is credited with expanding the borders of Rome, including into Gaul (modern France), and developing the Julian calendar, which is still in use today.

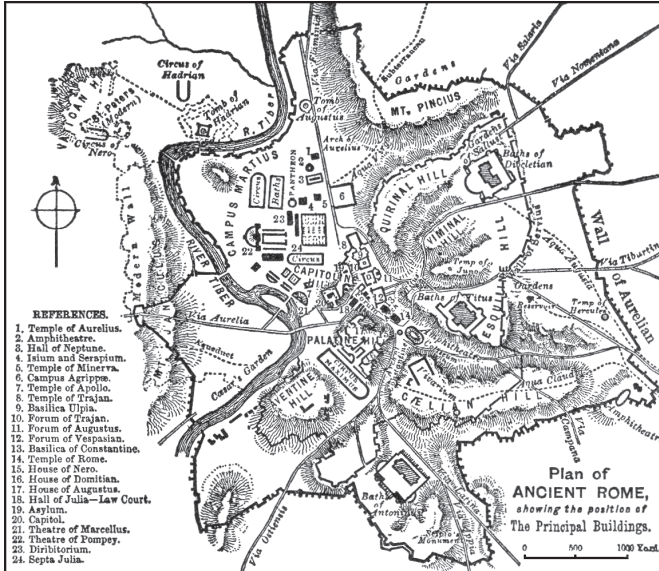


Augustus, also known as Octavius and Octavian, was the first Roman emperor, though he never claimed the title for himself. Taking power at just 17 years old, Augustus led Rome’s transformation from republic to empire during the tumultuous years following the assassination of his great-uncle and adoptive father Julius Caesar. He shrewdly combined military might, institution-building and lawmaking to become Rome’s sole ruler, laying the foundations of the 200-year Pax Romana (Roman Peace) and an empire that lasted, in various forms, for nearly 1,500 years. Augustus nearly doubled the size of the Roman empire, securing alliances that effectively gave him control of an area from Britain to India. Augustus developed a census and taxation system; expanded the Roman network of roads; built a grand new forum; and founded the famed Praetorian Guard, as well as a Roman postal service and police and fire departments.



Mark Antony was a Roman politician and general who developed a close alliance with Julius Caesar, his mother’s cousin. Antony served under Caesar in both military and political roles, and was his staunch supporter. Antony eventually rose to serve as Caesar’s co-consul in 44 B.C., and though he was unable to warn Caesar in time of the assassination plot against him, Antony took charge of Caesar’s will and papers and glowingly eulogized him. Unhappy with Caesar’s choice of the 17-year-old Octavian (later Augustus) as his successor, Antony engaged Octavian on the battlefield; the two later formed an alliance to rule as the Second Triumvirate, along with Lepidus. Antony defeated Caesar’s Senate rivals, finally quashing Rome’s Republican movement. While married to Octavian’s sister, he then famously embarked on a romantic and political alliance with the Egyptian queen Cleopatra that proved to be his ultimate undoing. Octavian launched a campaign against Cleopatra, and in a Shakespearean plot twist, both Antony and Cleopatra committed suicide, leaving Octavian to become Augustus, emperor of Rome.

SEE IT



Plan of Ancient Rome



Pantheon at Night. Photo by Jörg Bittner



The Death of Julius Caesar by Vincenzo Camuccini. 1771-1884

SEE IT



The Roman Forum. Photo by Carla Tavares



Roman aqueduct in a grain field

CONCURRENT EVENTS



FIRST RECORDED OLYMPIC GAMES

The first recorded Olympic Games were held at Olympia in the Greek city-state of Elis in 776 B.C., but it is generally accepted that the Olympics were at least 500 years old at that time. The ancient Olympics, held every four years, occurred during a religious festival honoring the Greek god Zeus. In the eighth century B.C., contestants came from a dozen or more Greek cities, and by the fifth century B.C. from as many as 100 cities from throughout the Greek empire. Initially, Olympic competition was limited to foot races, but later a number of other events were added, including wrestling, boxing, horse and chariot racing and military competitions. The pentathlon, introduced in 708 B.C., consisted of a foot race, the long jump, discus and javelin throws and wrestling. With the rise of Rome, the Olympics declined, and in 393 A.D. the Roman Emperor Theodosius I, a Christian, abolished the Games as part of his efforts to suppress paganism in the Roman Empire. The Olympic Games were revived as an international athletic competition in 1896, thanks to the efforts of Frenchman Pierre de Coubertin.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Faustulus finds Remus and Romulus with a she-wolf. By Maître aux inscriptions blanches, XV siècle

1

According to myth, Rome was founded by two brothers who were orphaned as infants and raised by a wolf. What do you think a myth is? Can you think of any others?

2

Ancient Rome has served as inspiration for countless movies and books. Why do you think modern people find ancient Rome so fascinating?

3

Roman emperors weren't elected, but some were very much beloved by the people of Rome. What qualities do you think made for a popular Roman emperor?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES



Colosseum at night, photo by Aaron Logan

POSTCARDS FROM ROME

Ask each student to research Roman historic sites and choose one for further study. Then ask them to create a “postcard” introducing their site. On one side of a card or paper, students should draw, paint or otherwise visually represent the site. On the other, they should report on the site, including what the site was used for; when and how it was built; who built it and why; its historic significance and any related preservation efforts.

NEWS OF THE DAY

Rome was one of the first cities to have a daily newspaper. Divide the class into small groups and assign each group a Roman emperor to research. Groups can then use what they discover to create an issue of Rome’s daily newspaper for a day during the reign of their chosen emperor. Articles can include features on the emperor; “international” stories on relations with other territories; the expansion or contraction of Roman territory; construction projects; possible daily events; and relevant cartoons and imagery.

ENGINEERING AN EMPIRE

Divide the class into small groups and assign each group to study one of ancient Rome’s engineering feats: aqueducts; arched bridges; domes; roads; or concrete. Then, ask them to recreate the feat in a 2D or 3D model and prepare a presentation to the class on the achievement including the science involved; how it was used; how it contributed to Rome’s power and prestige; and how the engineering feat is still relevant today.

RESOURCES

Video: Rise and Fall of an Empire

<http://www.history.com/shows/barbarians-rising/season-1/episode-4/rise-and-fall-of-an-empire>

Video: The Fall of Rome

<http://www.history.com/topics/ancient-history/ancient-rome/videos/rome-falls>

Video: Roman Roads

<http://www.history.com/topics/ancient-history/ancient-rome/videos/roman-road>

Video: Deconstructing History: Colosseum

<http://www.history.com/topics/ancient-history/colosseum/videos/colosseum>

Infographic: Rome: Ancient Supercity

<http://www.history.com/shows/mankind-the-story-of-all-of-us/infographics/rome-ancient-supercity>