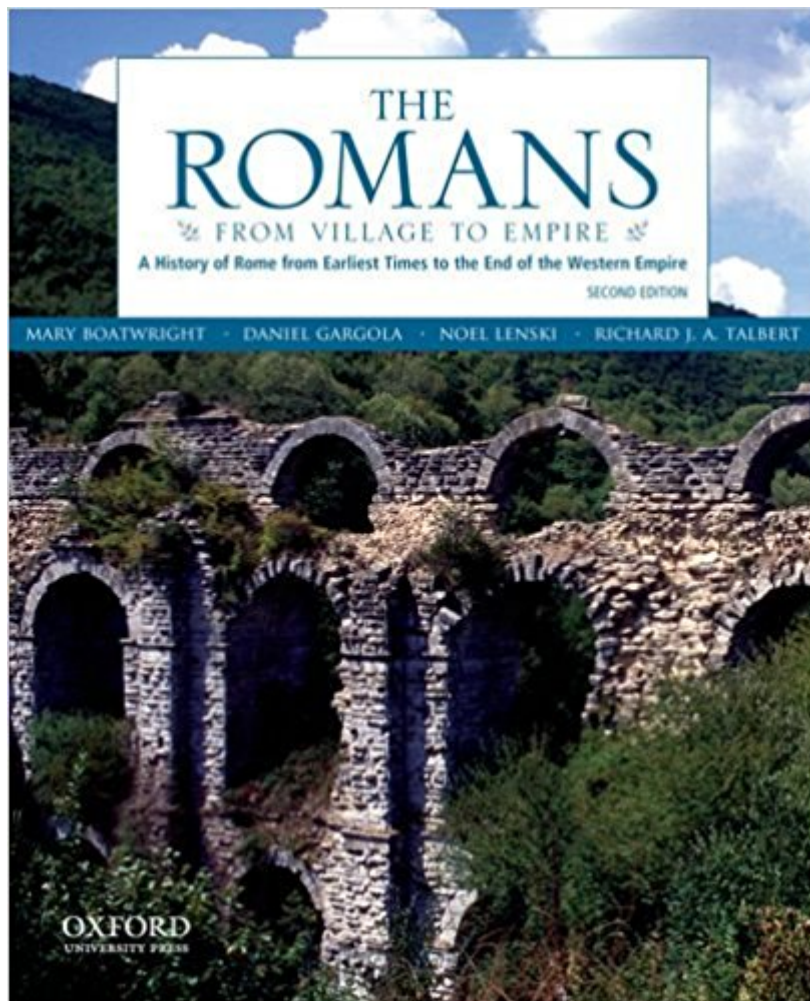


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The Romans: From Village To Empire: A History Of Rome From Earliest Times To The End Of The Western Empire



Synopsis

"The Romans is currently the best textbook on Roman history available in English."--Walter Scheidel, Stanford University

How did a single village community in the Italian peninsula eventually become one of the most powerful imperial powers the world has ever known? In *The Romans: From Village to Empire*, Second Edition, Mary T. Boatwright, Daniel J. Gargola, Richard J.A. Talbert, and new coauthor Noel Lenski explore this question as they guide students through a comprehensive sweep of Roman history, ranging from the prehistoric settlements to the fall of the empire in 476. Addressing issues that still confront modern states worldwide--including warfare, empire building, consensus forging, and political fragmentation--the authors also provide glimpses into everyday Roman life and perspective, demonstrating how Rome's growth as a state is inseparable from its social and cultural development. Vividly written and accessible, *The Romans*, Second Edition, traces Rome's remarkable evolution from village, to monarchy, to republic, to one-man rule by an emperor--whose power at its peak stretched from Scotland to Iraq and the Nile Valley--to the empire's fall in 476. Firmly grounded in ancient literary and material sources, the text describes and analyzes major political and military landmarks, from the Punic Wars, to Caesar's conquest of Gaul and his crossing of the Rubicon, to the victory of Octavian over Mark Antony, and through Constantine's adoption of Christianity. Featuring two new chapters (13 and 14), the second edition extends the book's coverage through the rise of Christianity, the growth of the Barbarian threat, the final years of the empire, its fall in 476, and, finally, to its revival in the East as Byzantium. This edition also combines chapters 1 and 2 into one--"Archaic Italy and the Origins of Rome"--and integrates more material on women, religion, and cultural history throughout. Ideal for courses in Roman history and Roman civilization, *The Romans*, Second Edition, is enhanced by two new 8-page, 4-color inserts and almost 100 extensively captioned illustrations. It also includes more than 30 ancient maps, revised and improved under the supervision of coauthor Richard J. A. Talbert, and textual extracts that provide fascinating cultural observations made by ancient Romans themselves. A new Image Bank CD contains PowerPoint-based slides of all the photos and maps in the text.

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Customer Reviews

'The Romans: From Village to Empire' is a new book by the Oxford University Press meant to be a companion to their earlier volume on the Greek civilisation. This text, written by scholars Mary T. Boatwright, Daniel J. Gargola, and Richard J.A. Talbert, is intended for several audiences - those with a general interest in history, beginning undergraduate students in historical survey courses, those with interest in archaeology, culture, and military events, and those who want a better understanding of the secular and sacred empire that preceded but gave rise to the current world of Christendom and European nation-states. The book is not one that is heavy on details, but is very well documented and annotated, with pictures, maps and drawings complementing most pages. Maps are generously provided throughout, including maps on the front and back binding pages. The authors do not limit themselves to a particular historical method - sometimes the events will be seen primarily through the biographical sketches of particular people (there are some historical periods for which the only surviving text evidence is later biographical writing about key figures), sometimes the events will be recreated through interpretation of archaeological finds, and sometimes on analogy and speculation based on other contemporary settlements and writers, although not Roman. The authors make clear at many points in the text that our textual evidence is most certainly a biased report - historians in the ancient world did not strive to write objective history as it is considered today, but rather often wrote with a specific intention, often the glorification of Rome or some family or person in Rome. The authors cite the Greek influence on Roman historical production - there were three primary ways to write a history: one, concentrate on a particular significant event or person; two, write a complete history of the city from its foundation to the present; and three, write a comprehensive history of the whole known world. Most Roman historians opted for the first two; the histories of founding-to-present done by different hands at different times highlights the difficulty of working with history, when events are so far removed from the author's time. The conflicting and contradictory tales of Rome's early days only add to the frustration of knowing the history before the Republic and Empire. Rome did at one point have a king - the authors list the seven kings according to Varro's list, including their dates (Romulus, from 753 BC to

Tarquin, who died in 510 BC). These dates and identities are far from uncontroversial, as are the figures who follow. Some consuls, tribunes and other leaders are well-known names because of the significant events and accomplishments with which their names are attached, but the political instability of a growing city-state with (for most of this early history) strict safeguards against tyranny that include one-year, usually non-renewable terms of office make for a confusing narrative. There were more likely more consuls in Rome during any particular century from the end of the kingly era to the time of Julius Caesar than there have been Monarchs of Britain and Presidents of the United States combined. Add to this confusion that they often came from the same inter-related families and thus bore the same names, and one gets a huge task of unraveling the historical record. Boatwright, Gargola and Talbert are to be given great credit for seeing through the task of making the text not only understandable, but enjoyable. In their thirteen chapters, they trace an historical pattern in chronological order, devoting each chapter to a period roughly 50 - 100 years in length. The first chapter looks at the state of early Italy generally, with its indigenous populations (Etruscans, Latins, Campanians, etc.) as well as the colonisers (Greeks, Phoenicians, etc.). The second chapter deals with the beginnings of urbanisation and the formation of city-states, including the early shift from kingdom to republican form of government for Rome. Rome's expansion beyond its own territory, beyond the Latin province and beyond Italy is described not as an inevitable march, but rather one of fits and starts, with set-backs and improbable happenings. How Rome's influence as an imperial power rather than simply as a conqueror in various parts of the Mediterranean world is also described in good detail. Wherever possible, the authors have brought in information about the various classes and orders of people, both in Rome, in Roman communities outside of Rome, and in provinces and subject states, to show the importance and the concerns for the plebs, the 'ordinary' citizens (and often non-citizens) of the city and empire. One will learn about the key issues here (the Punic Wars, Augustus' consolidation, Diocletian's Tetrarchy, etc.), key individuals (Sulla, Pompey, Augustus, Hadrian, etc.), and general trends (the rise and decline of the Senate, the uneasy balance of religion and secular concerns from the start, etc.) - one will also learn new things here, often overlooked in histories that concentrate just on the powerful and 'most noteworthy' people. The book is well indexed, useful and thorough. The appendix material also includes a brief glossary/biography listing of principle ancient authors, a general glossary of terminology, and a twenty-page timeline following four primary strands: West, East, Rome & Italy, and Cultural & Other Landmarks. While the timeline begins with the emergence of agriculture in 4000 BC (the authors use the BC - AD designation rather than the more general BCE - CE form), it really begins in earnest about 1000 - 750 BC, with the foundation of cities, including Rome, Carthage, and other

city-states. The authors also use pull-quote boxes to draw original source material quotations to support the general historical narrative being presented, which is very effective in its presentation.

I like this book very much. In reference to the previous review that labeled this book as 'devoid of the humanizing spark that makes history so much fun': I don't require everything I read to take the form of a bedtime story. I am woefully ignorant of history and so I picked this book up to learn about the establishment of Rome. I found it an excellent source - informative, unambiguous, and well written. It wasn't Lord of the Rings, but that's not what it's meant to be. If you are interested in educating yourself about history, like I am, you are probably mature enough to handle something that isn't written like a spy novel. Also, you probably don't want maps littered with troop counts, as one of the other reviewers suggested. This isn't a military history, it's a broad overview. It suited my needs precisely. Now I can move on to a book that takes up where this one leaves off and continues to into the Dark Ages. After that, I can come back and read the military histories and political dramas.

Having used this text for my Roman history class, I was quite pleased at the accessibility of the book for students. The authors took great pains to ensure that the text flows well, although there are some places where it backtracks in order to fill in some gaps. This is not a bad thing, for the big picture, I felt, materialized to produce a coherent narrative. Some of the minuscule facts were quite interesting. These led me to look at the bibliography at the end of certain chapters I had an affinity towards, leading me to further reading that enriched the panorama of Roman history. The authors, as they transitioned into each chapter, discussed the primary sources and their accounts. Some may find this interesting. The scholarship is superb, and the text did an excellent job at introducing Roman history that is palatable for the student. I was often taken back by the parallels that can be drawn from the Late Republic and the ultimate decline of Rome in comparison with the United States of today. These striking similarities brought this history to life. I recommend the book as a general introduction to Roman history, or as simply a reader for the backyard scholar. This is a great deal of history that seems to be speaking from the dust in this stage of American Empire. The chapters that introduced the politicians, who were dubbed popular "s," evoked the politicians of today. They understood that the dole controlled the masses. Another book that I would recommend, which enlightened my mind on how to use history, is Ludwig Von Mises' *Theory and History: An Interpretation of Social and Economic Evolution*. This may serve as a good primer for understanding that history is full of characters using means to achieve their ends, whatever they may be.

This is a long and sprawling history of the Roman Republic and Empire. It covers essentially all features of Roman life for the standard measure of the classical period, and considers social, political, religious and literary features of the Graeco-Roman culture. There are a few significant shifts in tone and style from chapter to chapter, making it less than impossible to guess at which chapters were written by the same historians. This isn't necessarily a problem, just a feature. One problem I found was the unsteady use of photos. There are spaces in the text covered in maps and photos, and others where you don't get a single photo for ten to fifteen pages. Moreover, the maps we never really helpful, just nice to look at, with basic geographical markers and the most important sites.

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