

Source: Catholic Encyclopedia

Rome

(...)

II. GENERAL HISTORY OF THE CITY

Arms and implements of the Palæolithic Age, found in the near vicinity of Rome, testify to the presence of [man](#) here in those remote times. The most recent excavations have established that as early as the eighth century B. C. or, according to some, several centuries earlier, there was a group of human habitations on the Palatine Hill, a tufaceous ledge rising in the midst of marshy ground near the Tiber. (That river, it may be observed here, was known to the primitive peoples by the name of *Rumo*, "the River".) Thus is the traditional account of the origin of Rome substantially verified. At the same time, or very little later, a colony of Sabines was formed on the Quirinal, and on the Esquiline an Etruscan colony. Between the Palatine and the Quirinal rose the Capitoline, once covered by two sacred groves, afterwards occupied by the temple of Jupiter and the Rock. Within a small [space](#), therefore, were established the advance guards of three distinct peoples of different characters; the Latins, shepherds; the Sabines, tillers of the soil; the Etruscans, already far advanced in civilization, and therefore in commerce and the industries. How these three villages became a city, with, first, the Latin influence preponderating, then the Sabine, then the Etruscan (the two Tarquins), is all enveloped in the obscurity of the history of the seven kings (753-509 B. C.). The same uncertainty prevails as to the conquests made at the expense of the surrounding peoples. it is unquestionable that all those conquests had to be made afresh after the expulsion of the kings.

But the social organization of the new city during this period stands out clearly: There were three original tribes: the Ramnians (Latins), the Titians (Sabines), and the Luceres (Etruscans). Each tribe was divided into ten *curiæ*, each *curia* into ten *gentes*; each *gens* into ten (or thirty) [families](#). Those who belonged to these, the most ancient, tribes were Patricians, and the chiefs of the three hundred *gentes* formed the Senate. In the course of [time](#) and the [wars](#) with surrounding peoples, new inhabitants occupied the remaining hills; thus, under Tullus Hostilius, the Cælian was assigned to the population of the razed Alba Longa (Albano); the Sabines, conquered by Ancus Martius, had the Aventine. Later on, the Viminal was occupied. The new inhabitants formed the Plebeians (*Plebs*), and their civil [rights](#)

were less than those of the older citizens. The internal history of Rome down to the Imperial Period is nothing but a struggle of plebeians against patricians for the acquisition of greater civil [rights](#), and these struggles resulted in the civil, political, and juridical organization of Rome. The king was high-priest, judge, leader in [war](#) and head of the Government; the Senate and the Comitia of the People were convoked by him at his pleasure, and debated the measures proposed by him. Moreover, the kingly dignity was [hereditary](#). Among the important public works in this earliest period were the drains, or sewers (*cloacæ*), for draining the marshes around the Palatine, the work of the Etruscan Tarquinius Priscus; the city wall was built by Servius Tullius, who also organized the Plebeians, dividing them into thirty tribes; the Sublician Bridge was constructed to unite the Rome of that [time](#) with the Janiculum.

During the splendid reign of Tarquinius Superbus, Rome was the mistress of Latium as far as Circeii and Signia. But, returning victorious from Ardea, the king found the gates of the city closed against him. Rome took to itself a republican form of government, with two consuls, who held office for only one year; only in times of difficulty was a dictator elected, to wield unlimited power. In the expulsion of Tarquinius Superbus some historians have seen a revolt of the Latin element against Etruscan domination. Besides [wars](#) and treaties with the Latins and other peoples, the principal events, down to the burning of Rome by the Gauls, were the institution of the tribunes of the people (*tribuni plebis*), the establishment of the [laws](#) of the Twelve Tables, and the destruction of Veii. In 390 the Romans were defeated by the Gauls near the River Allia; a few days later the city was taken and set on fire, and after the Gauls had departed it was rebuilt without plan or rule. Cumillus, the dictator, reorganized the army and, after long resistance to the change, at last [consented](#) that one of the consuls should be a plebeian. Southern Etruria became subject to Rome, with the capture of [Nepi and Sutri](#) in 386. The Appian Way and Aqueduct were constructed at this period. Very soon it was possible to think of conquering the whole peninsula. The principal stages of this conquest are formed by the three [wars](#) against the Samnites (victory of Suesaula 343); the victory of Bovianum, 304; those over the Etruscans and Umbrians, in 310 and 308; lastly the victory of Sentinum, in 295, over the combined Samnites, Etruscans, and Gauls. The Tarentine (282-272) and the First and Second Punic [Wars](#) (264-201) determined the conquest of the rest of [Italy](#), with the adjacent islands, as well as the first invasion of [Spain](#).

Soon after this, the Kingdom of [Macedonia](#) (Cynoscephalæ, 197; Pydna, 168) and [Greece](#) (capture of [Corinth](#), 146) were subdued, while the [war](#) against Antiochus of [Syria](#) (192-89) and against the Galatians (189)

brought Roman supremacy into [Asia](#). In 146 Carthage was destroyed, and [Africa](#) reduced to subjection; between 149 and 133 the conquest of [Spain](#) was completed. Everywhere Roman colonies sprang up. With conquest, the luxurious vices of the conquered peoples also came to Rome, and thus the contrast between patricians and plebeians was accentuated. To champion the cause of the plebeians there arose the brothers Tiberius and Calus Gracchus. The Servile [Wars](#) (132-171) and the Jugurthine [War](#) (111-105) revealed the utter corruption of Roman [society](#). Marius and Sulla, both of whom had won [glory](#) in foreign [wars](#), rallied to them the two opposing parties, Democratic and Aristocratic, respectively. Sulla firmly established his dictatorship with the victory of the Colline Gate (83), reorganized the administration, and enacted some good [laws](#) to arrest the [moral](#) decay of the city. But the times were ripe for the oligarchy, which was to lead in the natural course of events to the monarchy. In the year 60, Cæsar, Pompey, and Crassus formed the first Triumvirate. While Cæsar conquered Gaul (58-50), and Crassus waged an unsuccessful [war](#) against the Parthians (54-53), Pompey succeeded in gaining supreme control of the capital. The [war](#) between Pompey to whom the nobles adhered, and Cæsar, who had the democracy with him, was inevitable. The battle of Pharsalia (48) decided the issue; in 45 Cæsar was already thinking of establishing monarchical government; his assassination (44) could do no more than delay the movement towards monarchy. Another triumvirate was soon formed by Antony, Lepidus, and Octavian; Antony and Octavian disagreed, and at Actium (32) the issue was decided in Octavian's favour. Roman power had meanwhile been consolidated and extended in [Spain](#), in [Gaul](#), and even as far as Pannonia, in [Pontus](#), in Palestine, and in [Egypt](#). Henceforward Roman history is no longer the history of the City of Rome, although it was only under [Caracalla](#) (A. D. 211) that Roman citizenship was accorded to all free subjects of the empire.

In the midst of these political vicissitudes the city was growing and being beautified with [temples](#) and other buildings, public and private. On the Campus Martius and beyond the Tiber, at the foot of the Janiculum, new and populous quarters sprang up with theatres (those of Pompey and of Marcellus) and circuses (the Maximus and the Flaminus, 221 B. C.). The centre of political life was the Forum, which had been the market before the centre of buying and selling was transferred, in 388, to the Campus Martius (*Forum Holitorium*), leaving the old *Forum Romanum* to the business of the State. Here were the [temples](#) of Concord (366), Saturn (497), the Dî Consentes, Castor and Pollux (484), the [Basilica](#) Æmilia (179), the [Basilica](#) Julia (45), the [Curia](#) Hostilia (S. Adriano), the Rostra, etc. Scarcely had the empire been consolidated when [Augustus](#) turned his attention to the embellishment of Rome, and succeeding emperors followed

his example: brick-built Rome became marble Rome. After the sixth decade B.C. many Hebrews had settled at Rome, in the Trastevere quarter and that of the Porta Capena, and soon they became a financial power. They were incessantly making [proselytes](#), especially among the [women](#) of the upper classes. The names of thirteen [synagogues](#) are known as existing (though not all at the same [time](#)) at Rome during the Imperial Period. Thus was the way prepared for the Gospel, whereby Rome, already mistress of the world, was to be given a new sublimer and more lasting, title to that dominion -- the dominion over the [souls](#) of all [mankind](#).

Even on the [Day of Pentecost](#), "Roman strangers" (*advenæ Romani*, [Acts 2:10](#)) were present at [Jerusalem](#), and they surely must have carried the good news to their fellow-citizens at Rome. Ancient tradition assigns to the year 42 the first coming of St. Peter to Rome, though, according to the pseudo-Clementine Epistles, [St. Barnabas](#) was the first to preach the Gospel in the [Eternal](#) City. Under Claudius (c. A.D. 50), the name of Christ had become such an occasion of discord among the Hebrews of Rome that the emperor drove them all out of the city, though they were not long in returning. About ten years later Paul also arrived, a [prisoner](#), and exercised a vigorous apostolate during his sojourn. The [Christians](#) were numerous at that [time](#), even at the imperial Court. The burning of the city -- by order of [Nero](#), who wished to effect a thorough renovation -- was the pretext for the first official [persecution](#) of the [Christian](#) name. Moreover, it was very natural that [persecution](#), which had been occasional, should in course of [time](#) have become general and systematic; hence it is unnecessary to transfer the [date](#) of the [Apostles' martyrdom](#) from the year 67, assigned by tradition, to the year 64 (see PETER, SAINT; PAUL, SAINT). [Domitian's](#) reign took its victims both from among the opponents of absolutism and from the [Christians](#); among them some who were of very exalted rank -- Titus Flavius [Clemens](#), [Acilius Glabrio](#) (Cemetery of Priscilla), and [Flavia Domitilla](#), a relative of the emperor. It must have been then, too, that St. John, according to a very ancient legend ([Tertullian](#)), was brought to Rome.

The reign of [Trajan](#) and [Adrian](#) was the culminating point of the arts at Rome. The Roman [martyrdoms](#) attributed to this period are, with the exception of St. Ignatius's, somewhat [doubtful](#). At the same time the heads of various [Gnostic sects](#) settled at Rome, notably [Valentinus](#), Cerdon, and [Marcion](#); but it does not appear that they had any great following. Under [Antoninus](#), [Marcus Aurelius](#), and [Commodus](#), several Roman [martyrs](#) are known -- [Pope St. Telesphorus](#), Sts. Lucius, Ptolemæus, [Justin](#) and companions, and the Senator Apollonius. Under [Commodus](#), thanks to Martia, his morganatic wife, the [condition](#) of the [Christians](#) improved. At the same time the [schools](#) of Rhodon, [St. Justin](#), and others flourished. But

three new [heresies](#) from the East brought serious trouble to the internal peace of the [Church](#): that of Theodotus, the shoemaker of Byzantium; that of Noetus brought in by one Epigonus; and [Montanism](#). In the struggle against these [heresies](#), particularly the last-named, the [priest Hippolytus](#), a [disciple](#) of [St. Irenæus](#), bore a distinguished part but he, in his turn, incurred the censures of [Popes Zephyrinus](#) and Callistus and became the leader of a [schismatical](#) party. But the controversies between [Hippolytus](#) and Callistus were not confined to [theological](#) questions, but also bore upon [discipline](#), the [pope](#) thinking proper to introduce certain restrictions. Another [sect](#) transplanted to Rome at this period was that of the [Elcesaites](#).

The [persecution](#) of [Septimius Severus](#) does not appear to have been very acute at Rome, where, before this [time](#), many [persons](#) of rank -- even of the imperial household -- had been [Christians](#). The long period of tranquillity, hardly interrupted by Maximinus (235-38), fostered the growth of Roman church organization; so much so that, under [Cornelius](#), after the first fury of the [Decian persecution](#), the city numbered about 50,000 [Christians](#). The last-named [persecution](#) produced many Roman [martyrs](#) -- [Pope St. Fabian](#) among the first -- and many [apostates](#), and the problem of reconciling the latter resulted in the [schism](#) of [Novatian](#). The [persecution](#) of [Valerian](#), too, fell first upon the [Church](#) of Rome. Under [Aurelian](#) (271-76), the menace of an invasion of the Germans who had already advanced as far as [Pesaro](#) compelled the emperor to restore and extend the walls of Rome. The [persecution](#) of [Diocletian](#) also had its victims in the city, although there are no trustworthy records of them; it did not last long, however, in the West. [Maxentius](#) went so far as to restore to the [Christians](#) their [cemeteries](#) and other landed [property](#), and, if we are to [believe Eusebius](#), ended by showing them favour, as a means of winning popularity. At this period several pretentious buildings were erected -- baths, a circus, a [basilica](#), etc. In the fourth and fifth centuries the city began to be embellished with [Christian](#) buildings, and the moribund art of antiquity thus received a new [accession](#) of vitality.

Of the [heresies](#) of this period, [Arianism](#) alone disturbed the religious peace for a brief space; even [Pelagianism](#) failed to take root. The conflict between triumphant [Christianity](#) and dying [Paganism](#) was more bitter. Symmachus, Prætextatus, and Nicomachus were the most [zealous](#) and most powerful defenders of the ancient religion. At [Milan](#), [St. Ambrose](#) kept watch. By the end of the fourth century the [deserted temples](#) were becoming filled with cobwebs; pontiffs and vestals were demanding [baptism](#). The [statues](#) of the gods served as public ornaments; precious objects were seldom plundered, and until the year 526 not one temple was [converted](#) to the uses of [Christian worship](#). In, 402 the [necessity](#) once more arose of fortifying

Rome. The capital of the world, which had never beheld a hostile army since the days of Hannibal, in 408 withstood the double siege of Alaric. But the Senate, mainly at the instigation of a [pagan](#) minority, treated with Alaric, [deposed](#) Honorius, and [enthroned](#) a new emperor Attalus. Two years later, Alaric returned, succeeded in taking the city, and sacked it. It is [false](#), however, that the destruction of Rome began then. Under Alaric, as in the Gothic [war](#) of the sixth century, only so much was destroyed as military exigencies rendered inevitable. The intervention of [St. Leo the Great](#) saved the [Eternal](#) City from the fury of [Attila](#), but could not prevent the [Vandals](#), in 456, from sacking it without mercy for fifteen days: [statues](#), gold, silver, bronze, brass -- whether the [property](#) of the State, or of the [Church](#), or of private [persons](#) -- were taken and shipped to Carthage.

Rome still called itself the capital of the empire, but since the second century it had seen the emperors only at rare and fleeting moments; even the kings of [Italy](#) preferred [Ravenna](#) as a residence. [Theodoric](#), nevertheless, made provision for the outward magnificence of the city, preserving its monuments so far as was possible. [Pope](#) St. Agapetus and the learned [Cassiodorus](#) entertained the [idea](#) of creating at Rome a [school](#) of advanced [Scripture](#) studies, on the model of that which flourished at [Edessa](#), but the Gothic invasion made shipwreck of this design. In that Titanic [war](#) Rome stood five sieges. In 536 Belisarius took it without striking a blow. Next year Vitiges besieged it, cutting the aqueducts, plundering the outlying villas, and even penetrating into the [catacombs](#); the city would have been taken had not the garrison of Hadrian's [tomb](#) defended themselves with fragments of the [statues](#) of heroes and gods which they found in that monument. Soon after the departure of [Pope Vigilius](#) from Rome (November, 545), King Totila invested it and captured a fleet bearing supplies sent by Vigilius, who by that [time](#) had passed over to [Sicily](#). In December, 546, the city was captured, through the treachery of the Isaurian soldiery, and once more sacked. Totila, [obliged](#) to set out for the south, forced the whole population of Rome to leave the city, so that it was left uninhabited; but they returned with Belisarius in 547. Two years later, another Isaurian treachery made Totila once more master of the city, which then for the last [time](#) saw the games of the circus. After the battle of Taginæ (552), Rome opened its gates to Narces and became Byzantine. The ancient Senate and the Roman nobility were extinct. There was a breathing-space of sixteen years, and then the Lombards drew near to Rome, pillaging and destroying the neighbouring regions. [St. Gregory the Great](#) has described the lamentable [condition](#) of the city; the same saint did his best to remedy matters. The seventh century was disastrously marked by a [violent](#) assault on the Lateran made by Mauricius, the [chartularius](#) of the [Exarch](#) of [Ravenna](#) (640), by the exile of [Pope](#) St. Martin (653), and by the

visit of the Emperor Constans I (663). The [imprisonment](#) of St. Sergius, which had been ordered by Justinian II, was prevented by the native troops of the Exarchate.

In the eighth century the Lombards, with Liutprand, were seized with the old [idea](#) of occupying all [Italy](#), and Rome in particular. The [popes](#), from [Gregory II](#) on, saved the city and [Italy](#) from Lombard domination by the power of their threats, until they were finally rescued by the aid of Pepin, when Rome and the peninsula came under [Frankish](#) domination. Provision was made for the material well-being of the city by repairs on the walls and the aqueducts, and by the establishment of agricultural colonies (*domus cultœ*) for the cultivation of the wide domains surrounding the city. But in Rome itself there were various factions -- favouring either the [Franks](#) or the Lombards, or, later on, [Frankish](#) or Nationalist -- and these factions often [caused](#) tumults, as, in particular, on the death of [Paul I](#) (767) and at the beginning of [Leo III's](#) pontificate (795). With the [coronation](#) of [Charlemagne](#) (799) Rome became finally detached from the Empire of the East. Though the [pope](#) was master of Rome, the power of the Sword was wielded by the imperial *missi*, and this arrangement came to be more clearly defined by the Constitution of Lothair (824). Thus the government was divided. In the ninth century the [pope](#) had to defend Rome and Central [Italy](#) against the [Saracens](#). Gregoriopolis, the Leonine City, placed outside the walls for the defence of the [Basilica of St. Peter](#), and sacked in 846, and Joannipolis, for the defence of [St. Paul's](#) were built by [Gregory IV](#), [Leo IV](#), and [John VIII](#). The latter two and [John X](#) also gained splendid victories over these barbarians.

The decline of the [Carlovingian](#) dynasty was not without its effect upon the [papacy](#) and upon Rome, which became a mere lordship of the great [feudal families](#), especially those of Theodora and Marozia. When Hugh of Provence wished to marry Marozia, so as to become master of Rome, his son Alberic rebelled against him and was elected their chief by the Romans, with the title of Patrician (*Patricius*) and Consul. The temporal power of the [pope](#) might then have come to an end, had not John, Alberic's son, reunited the two powers. But John's life and his conduct of the government necessitated the intervention of the [Emperor Otto I](#) (963), who instituted the office of *præfectus urbis*, to represent the imperial authority. (This office became [hereditary](#) in the Vico [family](#).) Order did not reign for long: [Crescentius](#), leader of the anti-papal party, [deposed](#) and [murdered](#) [popes](#). It was only for a few brief intervals that [Otto II](#) (980) and [Otto III](#) (996-998-1002) were able to re-establish the imperial and pontifical authority. At the beginning of the eleventh century three [popes](#) of the [family](#) of the counts of Tusculum immediately succeeded each other, and

the last of the three, [Benedict IX](#), led a life so [scandalous](#) as made it [necessary](#) for [Henry III](#) to intervene (1046). The [schism](#) of Honorius II and the struggle between [Gregory VII](#) and [Henry IV](#) exasperated party [passions](#) at Rome, and conspicuous in the struggle was another [Crescentius](#), a member of the Imperialist Party. [Robert Guiscard](#), called to the rescue by [Gregory VII](#), sacked the city and burned a great part of it, with immense destruction of monuments and documents. The struggle was revived under [Henry V](#), and Rome was repeatedly besieged by the imperial troops.

Then followed the [schism](#) of [Pier Leone \(Anacletus II\)](#), which had hardly been ended, in 1143, when Girolamo di Pierleone, counselled by [Arnold of Brescia](#), made Rome into a republic, modelled after the Lombard communes, under the rule of fifty-six senators. In vain did [Lucius II](#) attack the Capitol, attempting to drive out the usurpers. The commune was in opposition no less to the imperial than to the [papal](#) authority. At first the [popes](#) thought to lean on the emperors, and thus [Adrian IV](#) induced [Barbarossa](#) to burn Arnold alive (1155). Still, just as in the preceding century, every [coronation](#) of an emperor was accompanied by quarrels and fights between the Romans and the imperial soldiery. In 1188 a *modus vivendi* was established between the commune and [Clement III](#), the people recognizing the [pope's](#) sovereignty and conceding to him the [right](#) of [coinage](#), the senators and military captains being [obliged](#) to swear fealty to him. But the friction did not cease. [Innocent III](#) (1203) was [obliged](#) to flee from Rome, but, on the other hand, the friendly disposition of the mercantile middle class facilitated his return and secured to him some influence in the affairs of the communes, in which he obtained the appointment of a chief of the Senate, known as "the senator" (1207). The Senate, therefore, was reduced to the status of the Communal Council of Rome; the senator was the syndic, or mayor, and remained so until 1870. In the conflicts between the [popes](#), on the one hand, and, on the other [Frederick II](#) and his heirs, the Senate was mostly Imperialist, cherishing some sort of desire for the ancient independence; at times, however, it was divided against itself (as in 1262, for Richard, brother of the King of [England](#), against Manfred, King of [Naples](#)).