

Republic truly feared the general Hannibal. He marched through the Roman countryside virtually unopposed for 13 years until his defeat at the Battle of Zama in 202 B.C.E. ended the Second Punic War. After it destroyed Hannibal's city, Carthage, the Roman Republic became an international power that later grew into a giant empire.

Military Units of the Roman Republic

Even hundreds of years after the fall of the Roman Empire, the Roman army and navy served as the examples for all other military units to follow. Check out the tactics, formations, and inventions that made the Romans the crew to beat.

[Roman Empire](#)



The Mysterious Etruscans

According to the Etruscan religion, any person who lived beyond the age of 84 was too old to understand the "signs of the gods." Likewise, this archaic, Greek-based culture saw its own downfall in the belief that the culture's existence was limited by the gods. Predating the founding of Rome, the Etruscan civilization was the first to inhabit the Italian peninsula. Here, learn about their pottery and gold work, music and fashion, history, and much more.

[Etruscan Empire](#)



The Etruscans

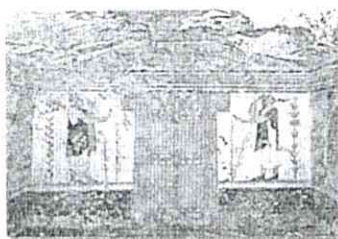
Although not many details are known about the Etruscan people, they left behind a wealth of art and architecture that remains over 2,500 years after the Romans overthrew the oligarchy of Etruscan rulers. Take a tour of Etruria, or visit the online museum for examples of the Etruscan way of life, long overshadowed by the Roman civilization.

[Roman Empire](#)



<http://www.roman-empire.net/maps/map->

become full citizens. Around 90 B.C.E., non-Roman allies of the Republic gained the rights of citizenship, and by 212 C.E. under the Edict of Caracalla, all free people of the Roman Empire could become citizens.



Frescoes line the walls of long-forgotten Etruscan tombs. This painting, found in the Tomb of Augurs in Tarquinia, is titled *Hell's Door*.

The aristocracy (wealthy class) dominated the early Roman Republic. In Roman society, the aristocrats were known as patricians. The highest positions in the government were held by two consuls, or leaders, who ruled the Roman Republic. A senate composed of patricians elected these consuls. At this time, lower-class citizens, or plebeians, had virtually no say in the government. Both men and women were citizens in the Roman Republic, but only men could vote.

Tradition dictated that patricians and plebeians should be strictly separated; marriage between the two classes was even prohibited. Over time, the plebeians elected their own representatives, called tribunes, who gained the power to veto measures passed by the senate.

Gradually, the plebeians obtained even more power and eventually could hold the position of consul. Despite these changes, though, the patricians were still able to use their wealth to buy control and influence over elected leaders.

The Roman Senate

The history of the Roman Senate goes as far back as the history of Rome itself. It was first created as a 100-member advisory group for the Roman kings. Later kings expanded the group to 300 members. When the kings were expelled from Rome and the Republic was formed, the Senate became the most powerful governing body. Instead of advising the head of state, it elected the chief executives, called consuls.



Senators were, for centuries, strictly from the patrician class.

They practiced the skills of rhetoric and oratory to persuade other members of the ruling body. The Senate convened and passed laws in the curia, a large building on the grounds of the Roman Forum. Much later, Julius Caesar built a larger curia for an expanded Senate.

By the 3rd century B.C.E., Rome had conquered vast territories, and the powerful senators sent armies, negotiated terms of treaties, and had total control over the financial matters of the Republic.

Senatorial control was eventually challenged by Dictator Sulla around 82 B.C.E. Sulla had hundreds of senators murdered, increased the Senate's membership to 600, and installed many nonpatricians as senators. Julius Caesar raised the number to 900 (it was reduced after his assassination). After the creation of the Roman Empire in 27 B.C.E., the Senate became weakened under strong emperors who often forcefully coerced this ruling body. Although it survived until the fall of Rome, the Roman Senate had become merely a ceremonial body of wealthy, intelligent men with no power to rule.