

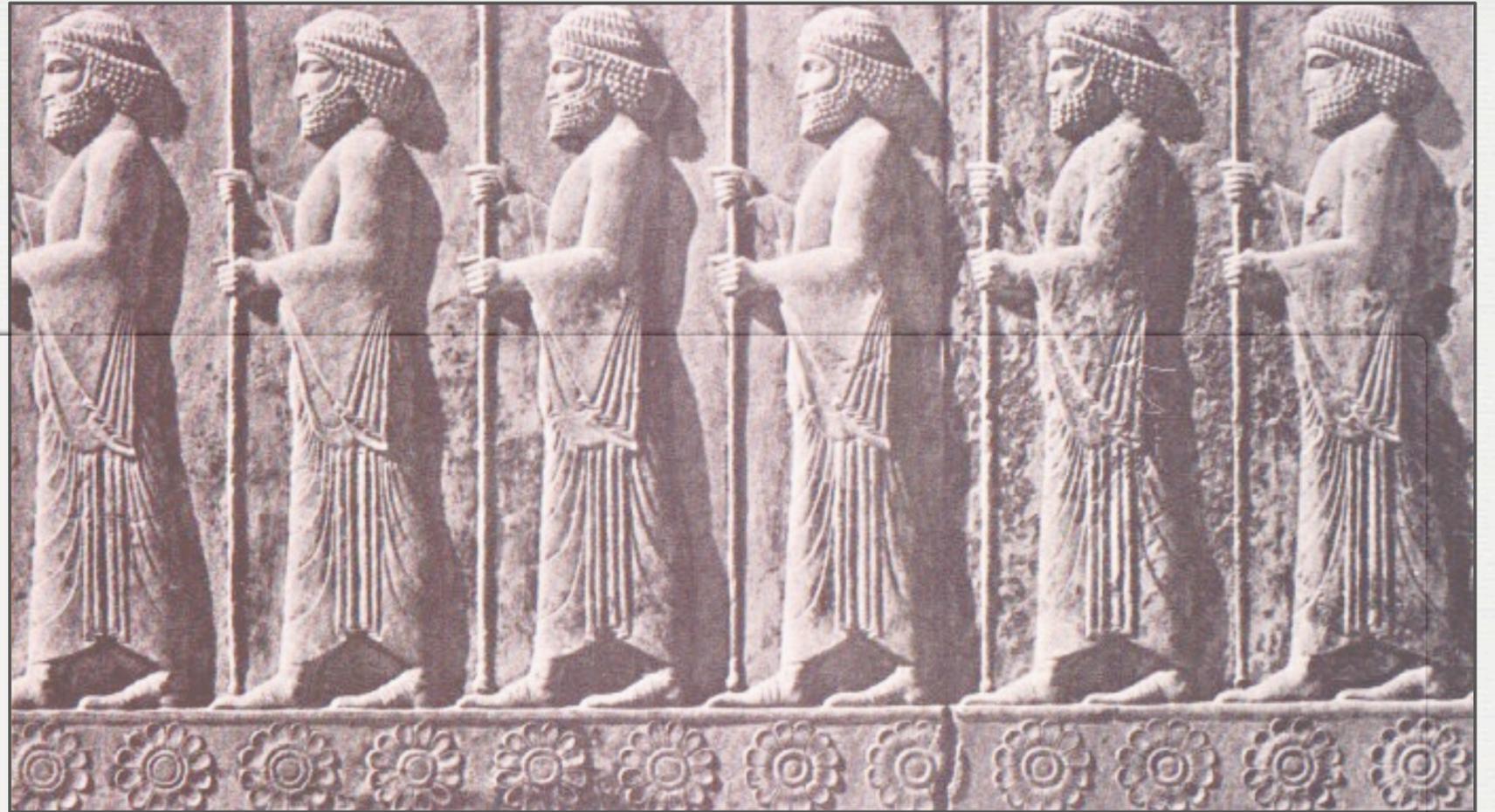
THE THIN TWEED LINE

BY STEVE N. JACKSON

PERSIANS, GREEKS,
HEBREWS, AND ROMANS

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Achaemenid (Persian) Empire



- The [Achaemenids](#) came to power in BCE 540 and inherited the cultural and legal traditions of the great Mesopotamian fertile crescent empires, capturing the capitals of Assyria and Babylonia.
- The Persian Empire was the first large multi-cultural empire with a road system, a centralized postal system, and a standing army.

Achaemenid (Persian) Empire

- The empire would be most noted for its contacts with two cultures that would form the basis for western thinking in the next two millennia: the Greeks and the Hebrews.
- The Persians were responsible for the spread of the Zoroastrian religion throughout the Mediterranean basin. This religion would have a profound effect on other religions, introducing concepts such as dualism (evil versus good), the concept of otherworldly gods (as opposed to those with the failings of humanity), and the concept of human free-will.
- Zoroastrian concepts of religion were responsible for the development of Judaism into its modern form.

Achaemenid (Persian) Empire

- The Persians were in contact with the Greeks as trading partners and adversaries.
- BCE 492 the Persian invaded the Greek mainland, seeking to end Greek interference in Persian Ionia.
- Although Persia was significantly more powerful than Greece, the Greek city states were able to fight off Persian domination until BCE 450.

The Greeks

- The Greeks from the literate [Mycenae](#), a bronze age cultural period when written language (Linear A and Linear B script), monumental agriculture, and bronze technology allowed for a flourishing civilization. The Mycenae period dates from around BCE 1,900 to BCE 1,100 with exact dating impossible to place. The literature of the Mycenae period though would survive and result in a literate classical Greece.
- The Mycenae civilization collapsed into a dark age (at a time when both the Hittite and Egyptian empires suffered destruction by a mysterious wave of barbarian invasions) that would last 350 years.

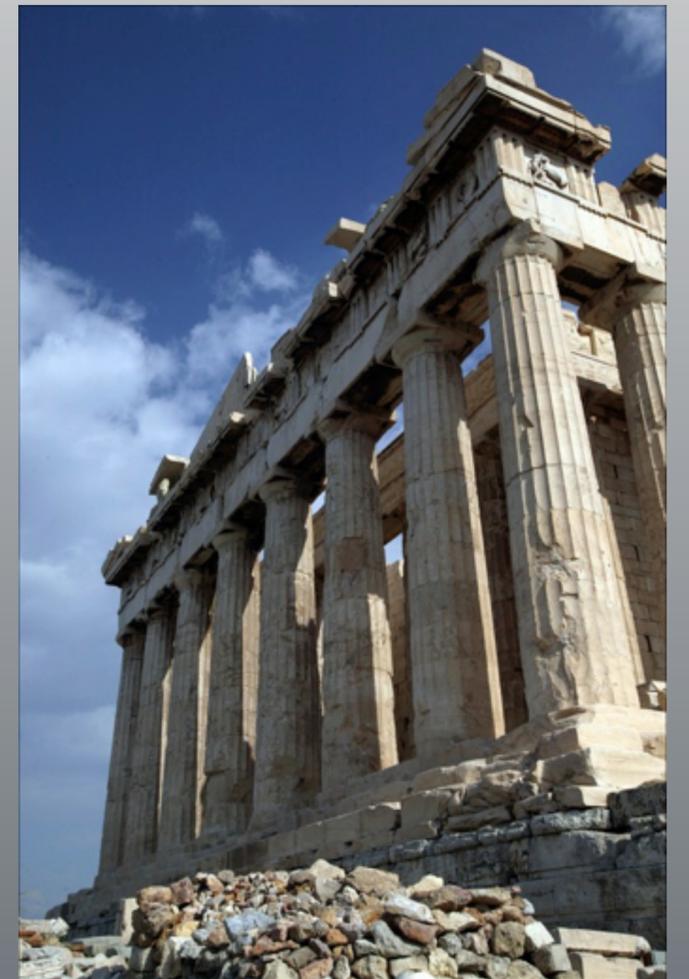
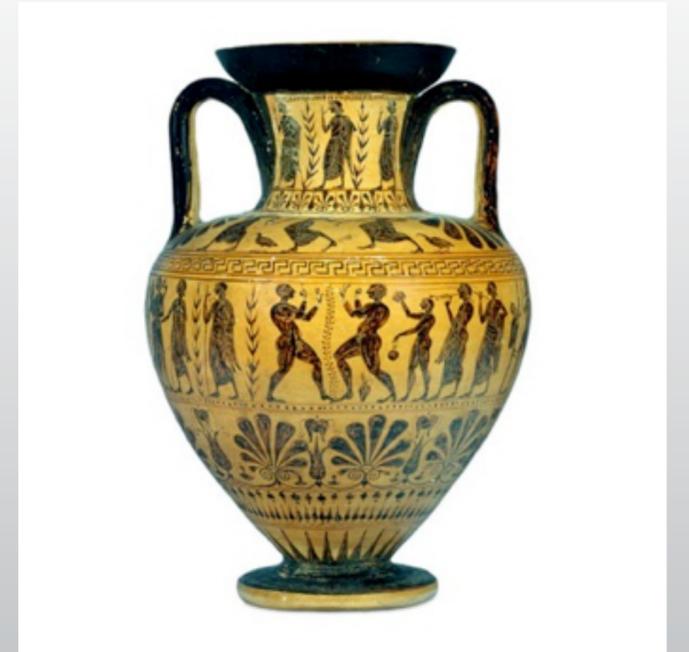
The Greeks

- During the period between the fall of the Mycenae (around BCE 1,100) and the rise of the classical Greek city states (after BCE 510) Greece underwent significant changes that are largely unrecorded to history, but which made their culture unique. One change seems to be the development of the **Solonian Constitution** that made wealth the basis for political power rather than birth, as was common in the rest of the Mediterranean basin.
- The Solonian reforms reduced debt serfdom and seems to have resulting in a concept of free citizenry that lead Greece to conceive all male citizens to be theoretically equal in the practice of law.

CLASSICAL GREECE

510 BCE TO 323 BCE

FROM THE OVERTHROW OF THE GREEK TYRANT TO THE DEATH OF **ALEXANDER THE GREAT** IN 323 BCE, **CLASSICAL GREECE** WOULD FORM THE FOUNDATION OF WHAT IS TODAY WESTERN CULTURE. THIS IS IN PART BECAUSE OF LUCK (ALEXANDER CARRIED GREEK CULTURE AROUND THE “KNOWN WORLD” AND THIS CULTURE WAS LATER ADOPTED WHOLE BY THE ROMANS WHO TRANSMITTED IT TO THE WESTERN EUROPEANS) AND IN PART BECAUSE THERE WAS SO MUCH OF THE GREEK THINKING COMMITTED TO WRITING.



The Greeks

- The Greek classical era starts around BCE 510 with the foundation of **Isonomic** legal tradition in Athens. Although significantly less open than modern Democracy, Isonomia as practiced by the Greeks was a unique form of government in that it required broad literacy among the citizen class rather than the formation of a small literate class that supported the aristocratic rulers of a nation (such as existed in every previous empire.)
- Isonomia is likely related to both the reforms of Solon, and to the Greek religion, which was a religion of story telling based in part by recounts of historical events such as the *Illiad*.

The Greeks

- Greek society taught all male citizens to read, write, understand and perform music, as well as requiring physical fitness of each citizen. All male citizens were expected to participate in the Greek democracy and to serve in the free Greek military. Although there were significant differences in how it was carried out (for example, Spartan and Athenian democracy was significantly different in philosophy despite calling on all citizens to be literate active members of the polity) most Greek city states adopted some form of democratic government during the classical period.

Socrates

- Greek education was universal for male citizens but normally stopped with grammar, basic math, and rhetoric.
- Greek higher education would form around rhetorical teachers, who would lead groups of students in thought exercises. One of the earliest of these instructors is [Socrates](#) (BCE 469 – BCE 399).
- Socrates was most important because of who he taught: [Plato](#).





Plato

- Plato formed one of the ancient world's first schools of higher learning, the [Academy](#).
- Many of Plato's writings were completed while he was at the Academy, starting the tradition of the teacher scholar.
- [Aristotle](#) would be the most famous graduate of the Academy.



Aristotle

- Aristotle expanded the concept of school from one where political rhetoric was taught, to one where science was actively pursued.
- Aristotle formed his own school, the Lyceum, in pursuit of this model.
- The study of the works of Aristotle and his students would be important in the development of modern western society.
- Aristotle would become the teacher of [Alexander the Great](#).

OTHER GREEK THINKERS

- **HERODOTUS** WROTE “**THE HISTORIES**”, AN ACCOUNT OF THE GRECO-PERSIAN WAR.
- **AESCHYLUS** WROTE GREEK TRAGIC PLAYS THAT TAKE PLACE IN HISTORICAL SETTINGS DURING THE GRECO-PERSIAN WAR. BEST KNOWN FOR HIS PLAY “**THE PERSIANS**”
- **DEMOCRITUS** PROPOSED THAT MATTER WAS INDIVISIBLE AT A POINT THAT COULD NOT BE SEEN (ATOMIC THEORY).
- **THEOPHRASTUS** WROTE THE BOTANICAL TEXTS “**ENQUIRY INTO PLANTS**” AND “**ON THE CAUSES OF PLANTS**”, BOTH WORKS WERE WIDELY STUDIED FOR MORE THAN 1,500 YEARS.
- **HIPPOCRATES** WORKED WITH AND WROTE ON MEDICINE AND WAS IMPORTANT IN DEVELOPMENT OF WHAT WOULD BECOME THE **HIPPOCRATIC OATH**.

ALEXANDER THE GREAT

BORN BCE 20 JULY, 356 IN MACEDON, A NORTHERN PORTION OF GREECE, ALEXANDER WAS TAUGHT BY **ARISTOTLE** THE TRADITIONS OF GREEK THOUGHT. USING THESE TRADITIONS, HIS OWN MILITARY GENIUS, THE WEALTH OF MACEDON, AND THE TECHNOLOGICAL SUPERIORITY OF THE GREEKS, HE WAS ABLE TO QUICKLY TAKE OVER THE “KNOWN WORLD.” IN THE PROCESS HE SPREAD GREEK CULTURE AND THINKING. HIS DEATH IN BCE 323 ASSURED HIS CONQUESTS WOULD FRAGMENT.



The Hebrews

- The Hebrews were a tribe of the southern Mediterranean. Around 1,000 BCE they formed a short-lived combined kingdom that lasted less than 70 years before splitting.
- The northern **Kingdom of Samaria** (Israel) was destroyed around BCE 720 and its population dispersed by the Assyrian Empire.
- In BCE 589 the **Babylonians** under **Nebuchadnezzar** sack and destroyed the southern **Kingdom of Judah**, taking its population into slavery.
- In BCE 539, with the fall of the Babylonians to the Persians, Cyrus the Great allowed the Hebrews to return and administer their own lands.

HEBRAIC TRADITION

JUST AS THE TRADITIONS OF CLASSICAL GREECE FORMS AN IMPORTANT PART OF WESTERN CULTURE, SO DOES THE RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL THINKING OF THE **HEBREWS**. THE MOST IMPORTANT WORK OF THE HEBREW PEOPLES WAS THE **TORAH**, COMPILED FROM ORAL TRADITION BETWEEN 500 AND 600 BCE. THE HEBREW PEOPLE, RETURNING FROM CAPTIVITY IN PERSIA, DECIDED TO CODIFY THEIR UNDERSTANDINGS OF THEIR HISTORY AND LAWS IN A SET OF WORKS THAT WOULD PRESERVE THESE TRADITIONS. THIS PROCESS, WHICH STEVE JACKSON CALLS **CANONICAL PRESERVATION**, WORK SO WELL THAT THE TORAH WOULD SURVIVE INVASION BY MACEDON, RULE BY THE ROMANS, AND EVENTUALLY, BECOME PART OF MANY OF THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS.



After the Exile

- The exile to Babylon caused significant changes to the Hebrews, as did their relationship with the Persians.
- First it put heavy emphasis on the written form of their religion. Many religious texts that were oral in nature likely were put to paper during this time (often in Aramaic rather than in the original Hebrew).
- Second, both a concept of an afterlife reward for ethical behavior, and an eschatological understanding of the world were inherited from the Zoroastrian religion.
- Finally, Jewish populations were no longer geographically limited. Like Zoroastrianism, the Jewish religion was able to spread with exiled populations, although unlike Zoroastrianism Judaism would never become a universal religion and would remain attached to the Hebrew people.

After the Exile

- The BCE 589 - BCE 539 exile saw an extended need to religious education among Hebrews, as Jewish priests of the first temple were scattered. The result was an increasingly formal religious training process that surrounded the establishment of **synagogues**, or places of communal study and prayer .
- The combination of a written codification of religious practices, a requirement for literacy to maintain worship practices, and later, the collision of Jewish religious practices with Greek social practices would make the Jewish religion one of the most literate and enduring of the classical world.

THE END OF THE PERSIAN EMPIRE

BY BCE 350 THE LONG STANDING
PEACE BETWEEN THE GREEKS AND
THE PERSIANS BEGAN TO ERODE,
LEADING TO BORDER SKIRMISHES
AND DISRUPTED TRADE. IN BCE
333 ALEXANDER THE GREAT
DEFEATED THE PERSIANS AT ISSUS,
LEADING TO A STRING OF VICTORIES
AND EVENTUAL DOMINATION OF THE
ENTIRE PERSIAN WORLD BY THE
MACEDONIAN / GREEK HEGEMONY.



Hebrews and the Greeks

The defeat of the Persians put Alexander in charge of the “known world” (a misnomer that is best translated as “civilized world”), but it was short lived. Alexander died and his generals divided the conquered nations. His general **Seleucus** would take over much of the Persian Empire. At the same time **Ptolemy**, another general, would secure Egypt, fitting into the Egyptian culture by becoming simply a new Egyptian dynasty.

The Hebrew nation started as a possession of the Ptolemy, but changed hands around BCE 200.

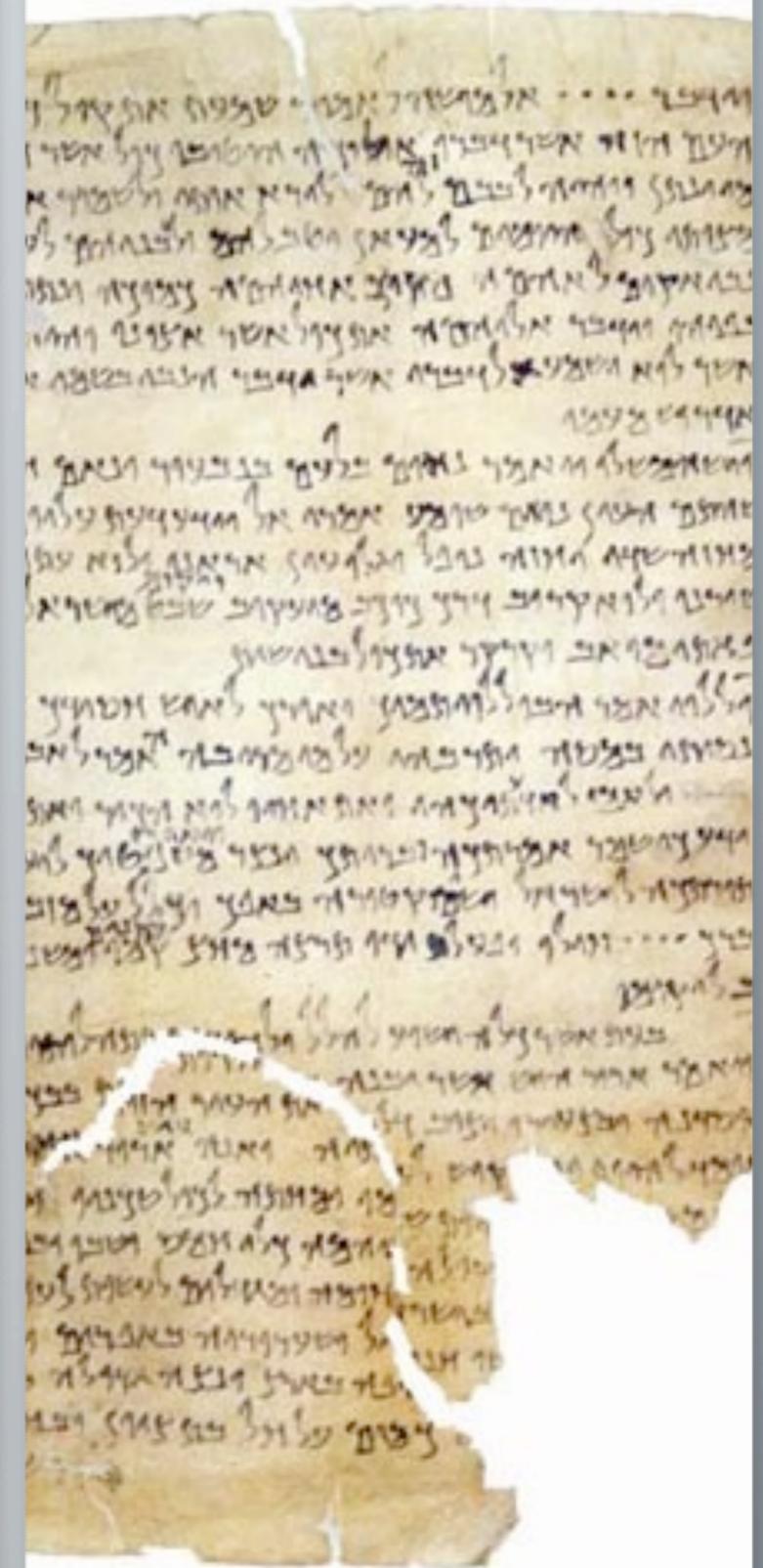
Judas Maccabeus

Jewish religious practices had resisted much of the cultural domination by Greek ideals found in other areas, but unlike the Ptolemy who decided to rule as traditional Egyptian autocrats, the descendants of the Seleucids choose a process of rapid hellenization of their subject peoples. The result was insurrection by the Jews in BCE 166. Lead by Judas Maccabee (the Hammer) the Jews resorted to civil war, throwing the Seleucids out in BCE 165.

Jewish rule of the Judean homeland would last until BCE 63.

THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

THE **DEAD SEA SCROLLS** ARE THE EARLIEST KNOWN JEWISH RELIGIOUS WRITINGS, AND DATE FROM AROUND 300 BCE TO 68 CE, CORRESPONDING WITH THE JUDEO-ROMAN WAR THAT REPRESENTED THE END OF THE DEAD SEA JEWISH RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY. THE WRITINGS WERE PROBABLY HIDDEN TO SAVE THEM FROM BEING DESTROYED BY THE ROMAN MILITARY. WHILE SECULAR AUTHORS SUCH AS **JOSEPHUS** WILL PROVIDE SIGNIFICANT UNDERSTANDING OF THE PEOPLE OF JUDEA, THESE SCROLLS REPRESENT THE ACTUAL RELIGIOUS WORKS OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY.





RISE OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

A SMALL ITALIAN TRIBE CALLED THE ROMANS ROSE TO PROMINENCE DURING THE PERIOD OF GREEK CLASSICISM, AND BY 146 BCE, WITH THE DEFEAT OF CARTHAGE DURING THE PUNIC WARS AND THE RAZING OF CORINTH BY LUCIUS MUMMIUS, HAD BECOME THE MOST POWERFUL NATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN BASIN. HEAVILY INFLUENCED BY THE GREEKS, BY THE FIRST CENTURY OF THE COMMON ERA THEY WERE ALSO BEING AFFECTED BY THE PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION OF THE MIDDLE EAST AND PERSIA.

THE COLLISION BETWEEN THE RELIGIONS OF THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE THINKING OF THE GREEKS WOULD DEFINE WESTERN SOCIETY.



The Roman Empire around 150 CE



The Roman Republic

- Formed in BCE 450 after the overthrow of the previous dictatorship of Rome
- After the death of Alexander, the Romans would slowly fill the void left.
- By BCE 44 the Republic, almost 400 years old, would control the Mediterranean basin.
- **Julius Caesar**'s appointment as perpetual dictator seen as the beginning of the end, despite his murder on 15 March, BCE 44.

Pont du Gard



The Roman Empire

- **Octavian**, the adopted son of Julius Caesar, defeats his opponents at the **battle of Actium** in BCE 31, and is installed as emperor of Rome, taking the name **Augustus Caesar**, and starting the empire phase of Roman society.
- By the reign of **Trajan** (CE 98 - CE 117) and **Hadrian** (117 CE - 138 CE) The empire would expand to nearly 6 million square kilometers in size (Washington is 184,000 square kilometers, the U.S. is 9.8 million square kilometers).

Legionnaire



Arena

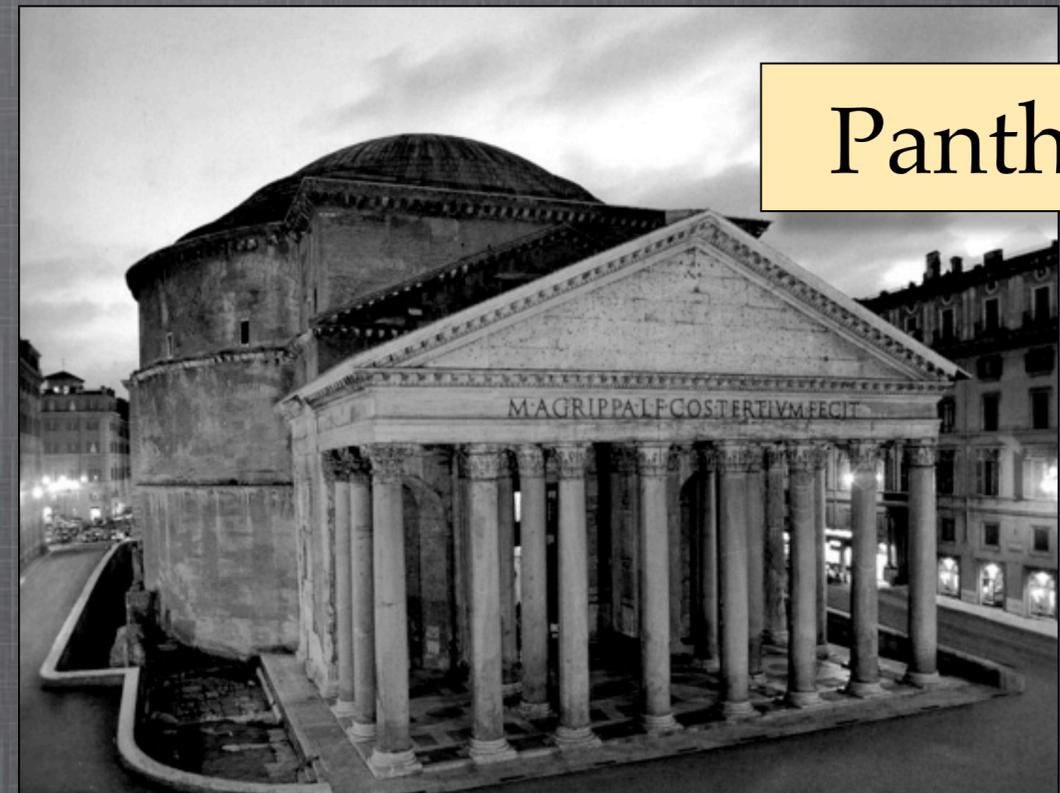


Roman Road Map
(Medieval Copy)

Roman Road
(modern gutter)



Pantheon



Roman Achievements

- *Acta Diurna*, first published in 131 BCE, was tasked with “*publicare et propagare*” or making public information to the people of the Republic.
- Roman architecture included improved **roads**, bridges, lighthouses, and arenas, all designed to improve communication in the Republic. Romans perfected the use of the **arch** and **dome** in civic architecture, as well as sophisticated **surveying** techniques used in road building.
- Roman housing and sanitation was also important.

Roman Education

- Roman education went from an informal system of family education to a formal, graduated, “for pay” system, influenced by contact with the Greeks.
- Roman education was limited in most cases to families that could pay. Roman families who expected political careers of their children though would educate children in a series of schools designed to teach Greek classics, rhetoric, literacy, basic math, and law.
- Roman higher education consisted of studying philosophy under the Greek masters.

Roman Engineering

- While traditional educational practices were mostly borrowed from the Greeks, engineering and architecture of roads, sewers, and buildings was tied to an apprenticeship system that could include service with the military or with private builders.
- The Roman road and bridge system was built originally by the army as military engineering.

Jesus of Nazareth

- The historical **Jesus** was a hebraic teacher active in the first half of the first century common era. He was born between 4 BCE (the death of Herod the Great) and 6 CE (the Census of Quirinius) in Nazareth.
- He probably spoke Aramaic, was literate, and was trained as a carpenter.
- The difficulty is pinning down historical information about his early years comes from his place as a member of the lower orders of society.

Jesus of Nazareth

- The historical Jesus would develop of group of Galilean fishermen and women. On his death by crucifixion around 33 CE he was deified by this group.
- Contacts with diaspora jewish communities, and later with gentiles who read the letters of [Paul of Tarsus](#), would spread this “religion of the lower class” across the Roman Empire.
- While the historical route this spread took is difficult to prove (lower classes are rarely written about) by 150 CE the religion would form a significant minority of the Roman Empire.



THE “FALL” OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

THE **ROMAN EMPIRE** QUICKLY ROSE TO CONTROL THE WESTERN WORLD AFTER THE DEATH OF ALEXANDER. ROME WOULD KEEP THIS DOMINANT PLACE IN EUROPE FOR 700 YEARS, AND ITS EASTERN PORTION WOULD CONTINUE UNTIL ITS FINAL FALL IN THE 15TH CENTURY CE.

WHEN ROME DECLINED, IT LEAD TO CHAOS IN EUROPE, WITH THE RISE OF PETTY DICTATORSHIPS AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FEUDAL DESPOTISM. ROME WAS SACKED IN CE 410.



Fall of the Roman Empire

- Roman empire splits into two halves in 286 CE, capital of the west moves to Milan (Mediolanum) then Ravenna.
- Constantine I (306 CE - 337 CE) converts empire to Christianity.
- Julian (332 CE - 363 CE) is last “pagan” emperor, pagan religions start to suffer at hands of christian emperors.
- 407 CE, last Roman coin minted in Britain, legions slowly withdrawn leading to the “Arthurian” post-roman period.

Fall of the Roman Empire

- Romulus Augustulus, last of the western roman emperors, deposed by Odoacer in 476 CE. This is the traditional end of the western empire.
- Except for a short resurgence under [Justinian I](#) (527 CE to 565 CE) the eastern empire would shrink until its destruction by the Turks in 1453 and the death of the last Roman emperor, Constantine XI Palaiologos, last seen fighting Turkish soldiers hand to hand at the walls of Constantinople.