

The truth about Rome and the strange death of the Roman Republic

By Andrew Mortimer

05 August 2024



Rome existed long before the Roman Republic was declared in 509 BC. Rome itself was founded circa 753 BC. It appears that Rome was part of the Etruscan Federation prior to 509 BC and the word Rome itself is most likely Etruscan. The question that is left unanswered is - how long did the Roman Republic actually last?

After the Roman Republic was declared in 509 BC, the fledgling republic fought with its nearest neighbours Veii (another Etruscan possession approximately 20 miles away). It took the Roman Republic over 110 years to defeat and subsume this nearby city and since the Etruscan Federation had approximately 30 of such cities, the Roman Republic would still be subsuming them today if they were attacking one after another. However, the Roman Republic had more problems coming its way.

In 387 BC, Rome itself was attacked and sacked by a Gaelic horde from the north and Roman senators were slaughtered where they sat. In 287 BC, Pyrrhus invaded Italy and fought 3 bloody battles with the Roman Republic. The Roman Republic lost 2 of these battles and while they won the last battle, Pyrrhus left Italy and was only vanquished by a well-aimed roof tile from an angry citizen in the city of Argos.

As such, the Roman Republic had a difficult first 222 years which included an internal conflict of its citizens called "the conflict of the orders". However, worse was to come in the middle of the 3rd century around 250 BC. This was when the Roman Republic made its final mistake and picked a battle with Carthage – in North Africa. Carthage was the largest trading partner of the Roman Republic who also kept the Mediterranean relatively pirate-free thanks to their vast naval power – as well as holding the numidians in Africa at bay.

Failing to reach a negotiated deal with Carthage ultimately would lead to the destruction of the Roman Republic and this is precisely what happened. After Hannibal defeated the 2 republican consuls in 216 BC at the battle of Cannae, Rome decided to set aside its Republic and the Republican principles in order to succeed in its ill-judged war against Carthage. Ultimately, Scipio-Africanus defeated Hannibal in the 2nd Punic war – which was only possible because Rome set aside its Republican principles.



The final destruction of the Roman Republic came in the 3rd Punic war when they destroyed Carthage in 150 BC on the exaltation of Cato the Elder – who would finish his speeches with the words "Carthage must be destroyed" (Carthago delenda est). While Carthage was certainly destroyed, the Romans lost their main trading partner, the navy that kept the Mediterranean safe from pirates and their Republican principles and government. Within 20 years of the 3rd Punic war, Roman consuls were being imprisoned by their own people, the pirates took possession of the Mediterranean and the so called "tyrants" and "dictators" took over in military autocracies from Marius to Sulla through the triumvirates to Augustus.

The truth is that after a difficult start the Roman Republic continued to struggle and gave way to an intermediate period before the Roman Empire was finally formed adopting more of an Etruscan monarchical model – but with lifetime terms of office. Hubris destroyed the Roman Republic in the late 3rd century BC and hedonism did not begin until Rome took possession of Egypt's wealth under

Augustus. When Rome took over Egypt in the late first century BC, the interest rate dropped from 12% to 4% because of the increased money supply.

Finally, it is noteworthy that the piracy created the need for Pompeii the great to be given the widest imperium in Roman history to crush the piracy issue. It was this investiture of Pompeii that led to the elevation of Julius Caesar – whose help Pompeii needed after he had successfully resolved the emergency caused by the pirates. The Roman republic's infatuation with battle and destruction directly led to their swift demise. As it has been said before, too often victors are by their own victories undone.