**Lecture Five -- Rome in the Eastern Mediterranean**

**Outline**

In this lecture, we will examine the explosion of Rome onto the eastern Mediterranean scene in the half-century following the end of the Second Punic War. By the mid-second century BC, Rome was unquestionably the most powerful state in the entire Mediterranean basin. Contemporaries were impressed by the rapidity of Rome's success, and by the scale of the Roman achievement in defeating more culturally advanced and formidable states with resources that seemed to dwarf those of the Romans. Polybius, in fact, was impelled to write his history of Rome to search for reasons for this unexpected development. The period is an immensely complex one and cannot be done true justice in a survey format such as this. Therefore, we will proceed by outlining the main wars and conflicts of this period, and we close by assessing the status had gained by c. 160 BC, as demonstrated by two illustrative events.

**I**. For contemporaries, Roman intervention in the eastern Mediterranean was bewildering in its speed and success.

**A**. Little more than fifty years elapsed between Rome's first moves eastward at the end of the third century BC, and her defeat of every major power and extension of control over the entire region.

**B.** Polybius, a Greek hostage at Rome in the mid-second century, was prompted to write his history of Rome out of a need to explain these events. His account remains invaluable, and it is our earliest extant written source on Roman history.

**II.** In three wars, the Romans took on and defeated the formidable kingdom of Antigonid Macedon.

**A**. The First Macedonian War (215 -- 204 BC) was fought while the Second Punic War was still in progress.

**1**. Following Cannae (216), Philip V of Macedon made a pact with Hannibal, since he believed that Roman power in Italy had been broken.

**2**. To prevent Philip from aiding Hannibal, the Romans sent a small force against him, and fomented local wars in northern Greece.

**3**. The war was little more than a series of skirmishes. It came to a negotiated end in 204 BC.

**4**. Nevertheless, their actions reinforced the determination of the Romans, to whom Philip had now been identified as an enemy.

**B**. The Second Macedonian War (200 -- 196 BC) was fought in the mountains of northern Greece, and saw the Hellenistic king humiliated by defeat at Cynoscephalae).

**1**. Roman allies in the east, Pergamum and Rhodes, appealed to Rome against Philip and the Seleucid king Antiochus III, who had signed a non-aggression pact with each other.

**2**. Despite being exhausted after the Second Punic War, the Romans sent a force into Macedon.

**3**. After several years of cat-and-mouse maneuvering, the armies clashed by accident at Cynoscephalae in 197 BC, and the Macedonians were roundly defeated.

**4**. A negotiated peace saw Macedon debarred from Greece and the Aegean Sea.

**5**. More importantly, the Romans now considered themselves protectors of the Greeks, a position strengthened by a complete withdrawal of Roman troops from the region in 194 BC.

**C**. The Third Macedonian War (172 BC -- 168 BC) spelled the end of the Antigonid Dynasty in Macedon.

**1**. Philip's son and successor, Perseus, abandoned his father's compliant stance toward the Romans, and began infiltrating Greece and the Aegean.

**2**. Diplomatic efforts to forestall a crisis failed, and war broke out in 172 BC.

**3**. After three years of maneuvering, the Romans and Macedonians clashed at Pydna in northern Greece.

**4**. Perseus was utterly defeated and deposed, and his kingdom was divided into four republics.

**5**. When these republics revolted under an Antigonid pretender in 150 BC, Rome intervened and annexed the former kingdom as a province (146 BC). In this year, Rome destroyed Corinth to punish rebellious "free" Greeks.

**6**. The Romans now had a permanent presence in the eastern Mediterranean.

**III**. While the conflicts with Macedon were continuing, the Romans also defeated Seleucid Syria and became the masters of the eastern Mediterranean.

**A**. After the Second Macedonian War, Antiochus III of Syria was invited to liberate the Greeks and fight the Romans.

**1**. Despite the Roman declaration of a free Greece in 196 BC, many Greeks were suspicious of Rome's ultimate intentions.

**2**. Disillusioned with Roman hegemony, in 193 the Aetolian League invited Antiochus III of Syria to liberate Greece.

**3**. The Romans were already suspicious of Antiochus because of his pact with Philip and his harboring of Hannibal at court.

**4**. When Antiochus landed in Greece in 192 BC, he was met with Roman arms. He was driven out completely in 190 BC.

**5**. The Romans counterattacked into Asia in 189 BC, and, although outnumbered by a factor of three, defeated a massive Seleucid force at the Battle of Magnesia in that year. The Roman General Scipio Africanus as once again a victor over a powerful foe.

**a**. Antiochus was forced to pay a vast indemnity.

**b**. Syria was debarred from operating in Asia Minor.

**B**. As a result of the Macedonian and Seleucid Wars, Rome had by 160 BC gained control of both eastern and western Mediterranean. Roman power was immense, and it could be exercised to the detriment and humiliation of entire states without violence.

**1**. In 168 BC, the Rhodians attempted to mediate between Rome and Perseus of Macedon. Roman suspicion was aroused, and Rhodes was ruined by a single decree of the Senate.

**2**. In the same year, Antiochus IV Epiphanes of Syria attempted to invade Ptolemaic Egypt, but was turned back by an unarmed embassy from the Roman Senate. The mere threat of confrontation with the legions was now sufficient to humble kings at the head of their armies.

**Explaining the Rise of Roman Power**

Polybius, a Greek captive at Rome who provided our oldest extant written source for Roman history, was moved to write his history of Rome by the remarkable nature of the Roman achievement in so swiftly conquering the known world. We shall now follow in Polybius' footsteps, and attack the issue from two perspectives: how was the Roman conquest achieved, and why did it happen at all? The first question is easy to answer: the Romans possessed the finest fighting machine in the ancient world, and they had huge reserves of manpower available. The second question is harder to answer. We shall therefore survey three of the main approaches taken to this latter problem.

**I**. The Romans won their empire by virtue of their superior military might and great reserves of manpower.

**A**. The Roman army of the Republic was a fine fighting machine.

**1**. It was not a standing army, but instead it was raised *ad hoc*.

**2**. It was composed of citizen-soldiers formed into legions, and of allied troops under Roman commanders.

**3**. Soldiering was a duty of citizenship, so each soldier provided his own equipment.

**4**. The legion was an independent fighting unit of about 4,500 infantrymen, subdivided into tactical units called maniples, thirty per legion.

**5**. Each maniple was comprised of two centuries, each headed by a centurion.

**6**. The troops were divided by age and equipment into three classes of maniples (ten per class per legion).

**B**. In battle, the Roman army was a formidable opponent and tactically malleable.

**1**. The army went into battle in a set formation, the *acies triplex*.

**2**. It charged on command, throwing two volleys of javelins before engaging at close quarters with short swords.

**3**. Because of the manipular and century organization, the Roman army was more flexible in the midst of combat than were other ancient armies.

**C**. The Roman army was characterized by rigid discipline and devotion to duty.

**1**. The marching camp is a good indication of Roman discipline: camps were identical in layout; thus each soldier knew his place, and could eat and rest well before action.

**2**. There was a system of rewards and punishments to encourage the men to perform well and dissuade them from shirking.

**D**. Their Confederation of Italy gave the Romans access to vast reserves of manpower that their opponents could not match.

**II**. Ancient explanations varied as to why the Romans conquered the known world as they did.

**A**. Polybius came up with layered reasons for the Roman success.

**1**. The overarching explanation was fortune's wheel in the grand scheme of things.

**2**. There were two more immediate reasons: the Roman army was practically invincible, and the Roman state was stable and well-balanced, allowing the Romans to concentrate on fighting opponents.

**B**. The Romans themselves did not do a lot of soul-searching.

**1**. To them, their empire seemed to be the natural order of things.

**2**. They believed that the power of their gods and the devotion of the Roman state to them was reflected in the success and extent of their empire.

**3**. There were some vague notions that their admirable qualities (justice, loyalty, hard work, and frugality) had earned them their empire.

**4**. The latter view sometimes came close to a notion of "civilizing the world."

**III**. Modern explanations are more searching, but they often reflect more the values of their proponents' times than they do ancient conditions.

**A**. A variety of ideas have, at one time or another, held sway.

**1**. In the last century, there were vague notions of the Romans civilizing the world.

**2**. Theodore Mommsen formulated the notion of "defensive imperialism" in the mid-nineteenth century. According to this theory, which stood for one hundred years, the Romans obtained their empire through actions taken out of fear inculcated by the Gauls in 390 BC, and Hannibal in the Second Punic War.

**3**. W.V. Harris painted a very different picture in 1979. He asserted that the Romans actively sought their empire for classically "imperialist" motives: greed and a desire for power. Roman society was highly bellicose, and this impelled them to act.

**4**. More recently, an approach based on system analysis has emerged: the Roman Confederation of Italy was essentially military in nature, and, in order to justify their continued leadership of the Confederation, the Romans were impelled to use the armies of which they gained control every year. This phenomenon has been called "path dependency" by Charles Tilly.

**a**. Arthur Eckstein's recent books also offer a "systems analysis" approach.

**B**. In each case, the modern explanations for Roman imperialism reflect the tenor of their formulators' own times better than ancient times.

**1**. Mommsen's "defensive imperialism" was appealing to nineteenth- and twentieth-century imperialists.

**2**. Harris' aggressive Romans were reflections of the post-colonial era, particularly post-Vietnam America.

**3**. The modern "systems analysis" approach fits our computerized era.

**4**. None of these views is wrong *per se*, but nor are they entirely convincing.

**C**. It was in the nature of ancient states to expand; the Romans did it best.

**1**. Expansion was the bread-and-butter of ancient societies.

**2**. The Romans behaved like any other ancient state, but they did so more effectively.

**3**. Historical contingency had given them control over great manpower resources, so their natural "expansion" was rapid and effective.

**"The Conquered Conqueror": Rome and Hellenism**

Referring to the Hellenization of Rome, the poet Horace turned a memorable phrase: "Captured Greece has captured her savage conqueror." The lives and careers of Polybius, a Greek, and Cato the Censor, a Roman, provide apt illustrations of both the rapid Hellenization that Rome underwent in the third and second centuries BC, as well as the reaction to it. Rome had certainly not been untouched by Greek culture prior to the third century, but the process accelerated as Roman armies moved eastward, and came into direct contact with the Greek heartland. We shall now examine the process of the Hellenization of Rome, its symptoms, the Roman reaction(s) to it, and its long-term effects on both Roman and European history.

**I**. Hellenization was an ongoing and slow process at Rome; it started well before the third century BC.

**A**. Roman exposure to Greek culture came early, and its beginnings are lost to us.

**1**. There are no starting or end dates for the process of Hellenization of Rome; it was a complex process of acculturation.

**2**. The Etruscans, thoroughly Hellenized, were probably the medium for early Roman contact with Greek culture.

**3**. The story of Aeneas, firmly rooted in Greek legend, illustrates this fact.

**4**. In the fourth and third centuries, the Romans moved further south in Italy, and encountered firsthand the Greek city-states in Naples, Tarentum, and elsewhere.

**5**. Roman involvement in the eastern Mediterranean, however, hurried the process.

**B**. Polybius (ca. 200 -- 118 BC) illustrates the situation in the mid-second century.

**1**. Polybius was a rising Achaean statesman from Megalopolis in the Peloponnese.

**2**. He was a typically urbane and educated Greek, and he was headed for prominence in the Achaean League.

**3**. Following the Battle of Pydna, he was denounced to the Romans, and interned without trial in Italy for sixteen years.

**4**. Polybius was no "hostage" in our sense of the word. He struck up a relationship with P. Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus, son of the victorious general at Pydna.

**5**. Polybius remained in Rome, as a "guest" of the Scipiones.

**6**. His treatment and position are atypical for thousands of Greeks who came to Rome as slaves in these years, hastening the process of Hellenization.

**II**. There are multiple symptoms of Rome's Hellenization in the third and second centuries

**A**. Education and a true Latin literature emerged.

**1**. Livius Andronicus, a half-Greek from Tarentum, acted as mentor to the children of a leading Roman senator in the late third century BC.

**2**. Andronicus translated Homer's *Odyssey* into Latin, and composed Greek-style literary works in Latin; thus he started the history of Latin literature.

**3**. Subsequent Latin authors show increasing familiarity with and usage of genres and modes of expression.

**4**. Some early Roman authors composed in Greek, such as Q. Fabius Pictor, the first Roman historian.

**5**. The rise of Roman literature was facilitated by the Hellenization of Roman educational practices from the third century onward.

**a**. Many tutors and teachers in Rome were Greeks.

**b**. Under their influence, traditional "practical" Roman education gave way to a Hellenized, verbally focused education.

**6**. Greek embassies and intellectuals began coming to Rome and giving public lectures.

**a**. Carneades of Cyrene, head of the Academy in Athens, dazzled the Roman upper classes with his rhetoric and learning in the mid-second century.

**b**. Asclepiades of Bithynia rose to great prominence as a doctor and medical lecturer ca. 130 -- 100 BC.

**B**. Roman art and architecture become Hellenized.

1. Romans prized Greek works of art, and originals or copies circulated widely.

2. Roman public architecture to this date was drab and rather Etruscan; it utilized mostly wood, mud-brick, and plain stone.

3. Successful Roman generals began building Greek-style temples in a new medium: marble.

4. Subsequent public buildings in Rome became more and more elaborate and lavish.

**III**. Roman reaction to the process was mixed and complex.

**A**. Many Romans exuberantly embraced the sophistication of Greek culture and language.

**1**. Roman aristocrats, we hear, adopted Greek dress, language, and habits.

**2**. How much the lower orders followed suit is not clear.

**B**. There was also a "traditionalist" counter-reaction, symbolized by Marcus Porcius Cato the Censor (234 -- 139 BC).

**1**. Cato was from Tusculum, outside Rome; he rose to prominence as a statesman, soldier, and writer.

**2**. He valued the old traditions of Rome: severity, seriousness, devotion to military duty, hard work, frugality, and so on.

**3**. Publicly, he railed against Hellenization.

**a**. He educated his own son in the traditional fashion.

**b**. He had Carneades ejected from Rome for undermining traditional values.

**c**. He particularly hated Greek doctors.

**4**. Privately, he was very familiar with Greek language and culture.

**a**. He displayed an intimate knowledge of Greek literature, even as he condemned it.

**b**. He wrote works in Latin style that consciously contrasted with the sophisticated Greek.

**C**. In sum, the Hellenization of Rome should not be simplified as a one-way process starting at a certain time and ending in another. It was a long and complicated process.