**Lecture One -- Introduction.**

We introduce the course by asking why we should study ancient Rome at all, and by considering the nature of ancient historical inquiry. The enormously rich heritage of ancient Rome for the modern world -- in the spheres of language, art, literature, engineering, architecture, and government, to name but a few -- more than justifies the study of the ancient fountainhead. Images and themes derived from or rooted in ancient Rome continue to exert an influence on the modern mind. In addition, unlike many ancient states, Rome changed hugely in many spheres over the course of its 1,500-year history, and thus the history of Rome is an engaging, complex, and challenging subject. We will initially set the thematic, chronological, and geographical parameters of the course, and, finally, we will turn to the nature of ancient history itself, and examine how it differs in means and method from the study of more modern periods of history.

**Outline**

**I.** Why study ancient Rome at all?

A. The heritage of ancient Rome is enormous.

**1.** The influence that Rome exerted on later ages, as illustrated by the "Grand Tours" that were conducted from the Renaissance through the nineteenth century, has been both profound and continuous.

**2.** The Roman legacy to the modern world in various spheres is inestimable.

**3.** From Rome, we have inherited, among other things, a reverence for the law. Law, as we would come to benefit from it in Western Civilization, was so magnificently crafted, so precisely codified in written language, and so procedurally perfected by the Roman world, that indeed we can say that Roman law was one of the great contributions of that culture to Western Civilization at large.

**4.** Certainly Rome influenced the Founding Fathers of the United States.

**B.** The images and themes of Roman history and culture continue to influence modern culture. Rome's is an interesting history to study, due to patterns of change.

**1.** Modern popular culture remains enthralled by images and themes drawn from the pagan Roman world: Julius Caesar assassinated, Nero fiddling while Rome burns, and gladiators fighting to the death before clamoring crowds.

**2.** Roman society changed enormously over its long duration: it evolved from a monarchy into a republic, and then back to a monarchy; it changed from a pagan to a Christian empire; and culturally, it evolved from a rustic and crude place to a sophisticated and Hellenized one.

**3.** The long period of Rome's survival, coupled with the processes of change, make Rome's history more dynamic and variegated than that of any other ancient state, and quite a few subsequent ones.

**II.** Introducing the course and setting parameters.

**A.** This course will outline the main events of Roman history in the political, military, and social spheres. Some attention will also be paid to cultural matters where pertinent (such as daily life in the ancient world, slavery, education, the role of women, and Roman paganism).

**B.** By "ancient Rome" we mean the period from around 1,000 BC to 500 AD. The course focuses especially on the period around 300 BC to 300 AD. Late Antiquity (AD 300 -- 500) is treated only briefly, and the Byzantine period (around AD 300 -- 1453), not at all; both are deserving of courses in their own right.

**C.** In geographic terms, we shall examine Rome's expansion from a small hamlet on a hillside overlooking the Tiber River to the colossus that dominated the Mediterranean basin and northwestern Europe for a half millennium.

**III.** Ancient History is not like modern history, which most people conceive of as "typical" history.

**A.** History is, typically, a combination of facts about the past and the interpretation of those facts. Ancient history is somewhat different from modern history in several areas.

**B.** The problem of evidence.

**1.** Unlike modern history, ancient history suffers from a relative dearth of evidence.

**2.** The body of ancient evidence available to us is finite, well-known, patchy, and often contradictory.

**3.** This makes the establishment of basic facts a more difficult endeavor than it is in modern history.

**C.** The scope of interpretation.

**1.** Due to the scarcity of evidence, the scope for interpretation is extremely wide in ancient history.

**2.** The circumscribed body of evidence is itself subject to constant reevaluation and interpretation.

**D.** The absence of certainty.

**1.** All of these circumstances make certainty a "rare bird" in ancient history.

**2.** More often there are merely competing reconstructions and interpretations, with no clear way to decide among them.

**3.** There are few "correct" answers to problems in ancient history; that is precisely what makes it so fascinating and exciting an endeavor.

**The Sources**

All history, and especially ancient history, is founded on knowledge and use of the "primary sources," that is, those sources which derive directly from the period under study. Before embarking on our survey of ancient Roman history, it is advisable to assess the sorts of evidence that we have available to us from the ancient world. Those sources divided into two groups: archaeological (physical) evidence, and written evidence. We will discuss, with examples, the relative merits and limitations of each type.

**I.** History is based on "primary sources."

**A**. "Primary sources" are those sources that derive directly from the period under study.

**1**. "Primary sources" can vary in quality and focus, and they can sometimes be removed from their subjects b some distance. Whatever the case, they hail from the cultural ethos of the ancient world.

**2**. "Secondary sources," in contrast, are works of modern scholarship about the ancient past.

**3**. All secondary sources are grounded in primary sources.

**B**. Historical theorists have argued at length about the relative merits of primary sources.

**1**. One view, called "positivism," says that one can never go beyond what the primary sources tell us.

**2**. "New History" holds to the view that the primary evidence can be supplemented by comparative and theoretical data drawn from other realms of scholarship. The inherent bias of the practicing historian can be thus minimized, and the past "reality" can be reconstructed by close attention to the original context of the primary evidence. This is history "from the bottom up."

**3**. "Postmodernists" argue that there is no reality beyond the text. The inherent bias of the historian cannot be overcome, and, in fact, history is not "reconstructed," but merely "constructed" in the image of the historian's biases.

**4**. In this course, we shall take a broadly New Historical, while acknowledging the warnings of the "postmodernists" about the depth of one's own bias.

**II**. Archaeological evidence comprises any and all physical material that survives from antiquity.

**A.** At just over 125 years old, "scientific" archaeology is a new discipline, and has turned up a variety of physical evidence for our consideration.

**1.** "Macro" evidence comprises such artifacts as entire cities, buildings, infrastructures, ships, works of art, corpses, and so on.

**2.** "Micro" evidence offers fragments of pots, bones, textiles, and other small items, and even pollen and micro-organisms.

**3.** Pottery is a very small common and important type of archaeological evidence.

**B.** Archaeological excavation is destructive, and the evidence it produces is mute and only "speaks" when interpreted.

**III.** Written evidence offers unparalleled insights into the lives of the ancients.

**A.** Ancient literature is rich and varied, and it is an invaluable historical tool.

**1.** The surviving body of Roman literature comprises many genres.

**2.** Classical literature gives us windows into ancient life as lived by the ancients, into their values and preoccupations, the main events of their history, and their own view of themselves.

**3.** Ancient literature mostly survives in medieval copies, and is therefore a selected body of material, subject to loss or the introduction of error in the process of copying.

**B.** Epigraphic evidence comprises inscriptions with varied content carved on a variety of surfaces.

**1.** Inscriptions can be carved on stone, metal, bone, wood, bark, parchment, or papyrus.

**2.** They include epitaphs, decrees, laws, commemorative and honorary texts, letters, notes, and graffiti.

**3**. Unlike literary evidence, epigraphic evidence has not been selected or copied over the centuries, but speaks to us directly from antiquity.

**C**. Ancient written evidence has its limitations.

**1**. Roman literature was written by upper-class men, who mostly lived at Rome, between c. 200 BC and 200 AD.

**2**. Inscriptions are largely formulaic, and for the most part not particularly informative for the major events of Roman history. There are notable exceptions to this, however.

**D**. The study of coins (numismatics) and papyrus (papyrology) are two important subfields in the investigation of ancient evidence.

**1**. Roman coins are both archaeological and epigraphic artifacts, in that they can be studied from both perspectives.

**2**. Papyrus is a particular kind of inscriptional source, often presenting detailed portraits of life at the local level.

**Pre-Roman Italy and the Etruscans**

Before investigating the legendary founding of Rome, we must survey the geography of ancient Italy, and the political and cultural situation that obtained there in the pre-Roman period. The peninsula was mostly inhabited by tribal peoples, speaking a variety of Italic languages. The two major exceptions to this pattern of tribal settlement were the Greek colonizers in southern Italy and Sicily, and the Etruscans in the region immediately north of Rome. We shall also outline some of the main characteristics of Etruscan civilization.

**I**. The geography of the Italian peninsula offered many benefits to its inhabitants.

**A**. The peninsula is well-watered and well-endowed with natural resources.

**1**. The Alps in the north, and the Apennine range that runs down the center of Italy provide springs, streams, and rivers more than sufficient to supply the inhabitants.

**2**. The largest rivers in Italy, and the ones with which we shall be mostly concerned, are the Po and Arno Rivers in the north, and the Tiber in central Italy.

**3**. The mountainous nature of the country guaranteed an abundance of wood and ores for the ancient Italians, and pasture for sheep and goats.

**B**. The plains are fertile.

**1**. The three main plains of Italy are the Po River valley in the north, the plain of Latium around Rome, and Campania around Naples.

**2**. Campania, in particular, with its volcanic soil, pleasant climate, and natural hot springs, was destined to become a popular pleasure spot for the Roman elite.

**3**. The plain of Latium, on the north edge of which lay the Tiber River and the site of Rome, is surrounded by the sea to the west and mountains to the east. A range of low hills (the Alban hills) is located in the center of the plain.

**4**. All of these plains are fertile. By the time of Roman expansion into Italy, all were inhabited by settled people practicing agriculture.

**II**. With the exception of the Greek colonizers and the Etruscans, pre-Roman Italy was inhabited by non-urbanized, tribal peoples.

**A**. The tribal cultures of pre-Roman Italy are difficult to study.

**1**. Archaeology shows that Italy had human inhabitants as early as the Stone Age.

**2**. Literary sources become available only in the fifth century BC, by which time the immediately pre-Roman tribal cultures of Italy had existed for 500 years or more.

**3**. The situation before ca. 400 BC is therefore very hard to reconstruct.

**B**. Pre-Roman tribal Italy was a quilt of languages and cultures.

**1**. Archaeology and linguistics are our main avenues for studying this period. Two archaeological keys are burial styles and pottery.

**2**. At least forty languages and dialects have been determined.

**3**. A broad division appears to have existed between settled agriculturalists in the plains, and their threatening mountain-dwelling neighbors.

**4**. The situation in 400 BC was as follows, north to south: the Celtic Gauls had control of the Po Valley, the Etruscans were to their south, then came the Romans and the Latins, the Oscans and Samnites controlled Central Italy and parts of Campania, and the Greeks were found in the south.

**C**. The Greeks and Etruscans were urbanized cultures.

**1**. The Greek colonies in Italy were localized affairs and centered on coastal cities, notably Naples and Tarentum.

**2**. The Etruscans, too, were an urbanized people and much influenced by the Greeks (that is, "Hellenized").

**III**. The Etruscans.

**A**. The origins of the Etruscans are unclear.

**1**. No Etruscan literature survives; they are studied through archaeology, later Roman tales about them, mentions in Greek sources, and surviving inscriptions in their ill-understood language.

**2**. They may have been migrants from the Eastern Mediterranean.

**3**. More likely, they were a native Italian culture (called "Villanovan") that become urbanized around 800--700 BC, perhaps through contact with the Greeks.

**B**. They were not a politically unified people.

**1**. The Etruscans were very influential in Italy, but were not unified.

**2**. They had a League of Twelve Cities, which often warred with each other.

**3**. They were united by language and religion, and the Cities could occasionally work in concert.

**4**. Originally ruled by kings, many Etruscan cities became oligarchies, ruled by councils of leading families.

**C**. The nature of Etruscan "control" in Italy is unclear.

**1**. Earlier scholars imagined a sort of "Etruscan Empire" in Italy, stretching from the Po Valley to Campania. This empire collapsed in the fifth and fourth centuries BC in the face of resistance from the Greeks in the south and incursions of Gauls in the north.

**2**. More recently, it has been proposed that there was a looser sphere of Etruscan influence, predominantly on the cultural plane; there was, therefore, no "Etruscan Empire."

**3**. This debate affects how historians read the early history of Rome, particularly the question of "Etruscan Rome" under the last kings.

**D**. The Etruscans were absorbed by the Romans, but they greatly influenced Roman culture.

**1.** The main areas of Etruscan influence on the Romans were in religion and statecraft, but also in architecture.

**2**. From the late third century BC onwards, the Etruscans were thoroughly absorbed into the Roman state, and by the age of the emperors they had ceased to exist as a distinct cultural group.

**The Foundation of Rome**

The two stories of Rome's foundation, which was traditionally dated to 753 BC, are well known, namely, those of Romulus and Remus, as well as that of Aeneas. The archaeological evidence tells a somewhat different, but not incompatible story. The question of Rome's foundation offers an excellent window onto the relative merits of archeological and written evidence when they are deployed together in pursuit of a specific historical problem.

**I.** Later Romans preserved two tales of the foundation of their city.

**A.** The story of Romulus and Remus was probably a local folk legend.

**1**. Romulus and Remus escaped death as infants and founded Rome.

**2**. The story has characteristic folkloric elements that suggest it is very old, and local in origin.

**B**. The story of Aeneas derives from a Hellenized source, reflecting Greek legends.

**1.** Aeneas, the sole survivor of Troy, wandered the Mediterranean before settling in Italy at Lavinium, where he founded a town.

**2.** This legend must derive from a Greek or Hellenized source, but it is probably older than many have assumed.

**3.** The two stories were untied into a single tradition by making Romulus and Remus descendants of Aeneas.

**4.** Aeneas founded the Roman people; Romulus and Remus founded the city of Rome.

**II.** Archeological evidence suggests that settlement at Rome began as early as 1500 BC, but it does not offer any evidence that substantially contradicts the legends.

**A.** The site of Rome was advantageous.

**1.** It overlooked a ford in the Tiber near an island in the stream; it could control north-south traffic between Etruria and Latium and east-west traffic from the interior to the coast.

**2.** It was hilly, defensible, and well-watered.

**3.** Signs of early human habitation (i.e pottery shards) date to c. 1500 BC, with the first permanent settlement, as indicated by graves, founded in c. 1000 BC.

**B.** Originally, Rome was a series of separate villages; evidence of these settlements has been found.

**1.** From then, and into the eighth century BC, Rome developed as a series of small villages on neighboring hilltops.

**2.** At some stage -- dates are impossible to establish -- these communities coalesced into a single community, and Rome, as an entity, was born.

**3.** Spectacular finds on the Palatine Hill in Rome in the 1930s revealed postholes for wooden huts that dated to the mid-eighth century, c. 753 BC.

**4.** Later Romans maintained a hut on the Palatine that they called "The Hut of Romulus."

**III.** Archaeology cannot confirm legends.

**A.** Archeological evidence needs to be interpreted to make sense.

**1.** The presence of worship centers embracing Aeneas in Lavinium does not "prove" the Aeneas legend. The worship of Aeneas at Lavinium is likely the result of the fame of the legend, not vice versa.

**2.** The coincidence of the Palatine huts and the traditional foundation date does not "prove" the Romulus legend. In fact, the settlement of which the huts are part dates to 1000 BC.

**3.** Archeological evidence is mute; it cannot "prove" legendary evidence, but occasionally it can disprove it.

**4.** The archeology does suggest an early pattern of settlement at Rome, becoming more complex in the eighth century, and coalescing into a single community sometime after that (a process termed synoikism).

**B.** Therefore, the issue of sources for this early period of Roman history is an important consideration to bear in mind.