**Lecture Three -- The Early to Middle Republic: 509 BC -- 264 BC.**

**Overview**

We shall now examine the so-called Struggle of the Orders, which was a socio-political conflict between the patricians and the plebs that dominated Roman domestic politics from 494 BC to 287 BC. Despite concerns about the quality of the ancient sources for our information about these events, the outline seems clear enough. It was a protracted struggle between Orders over social, economic, and judicial issues of interest to the plebs and over access to the political system. Its resolution lent a new shape to the government of the Republic.

**I**. The written sources for the Struggle of the Orders portray it simplistically, but a close reading can reveal some of the genuine issues that generated the conflict.

**A**. The later sources for the Struggle, which survive for us to read, are not without problems, but they are usable nonetheless.

**1**. Our sources depict the Struggle as an entirely political one, and they appear to retroject later patterns of behavior onto this early period.

**2**. In fact, some of the original issues can be discerned, however, dimly.

**3**. Despite the problems of the evidence, then, the outline of the Struggle is clear enough, even if the details are more open to question.

**B**. The issues that appear to have generated the Struggle of the Orders can be discerned.

**1**. Our later sources focus on one such issue -- access to the political system. This issue, however, appears to have arisen only later in the Struggle.

**2**. Relief from debt, and, in particular, from debt-bondage was a early issue.

**3**. The plebs also demanded judicial reform and codification of the laws to prevent arbitrary treatment at the hands of the aristocrats.

**4**. There was a desire for reform to distribute newly conquered territories among the poorer citizens.

**5**. The Struggle, then, was really a series of struggles over different issues. Our later sources have simplified this complex picture considerably.

**II**. The Struggle of the Orders dominated Roman politics in the early Republic.

**A**. The patricians dominated the Roman political system in the early Republic.

**1**. Plebs were not excluded *per se*, as the consular lists (*fasti*) show.

**2**. At some stage in the mid-fifth century the patriciate "closed," and no additional families were admitted to its ranks. The closed patriciate then dominated politics.

**3**. One thread of conflict is the Struggle was to "re-open" access to the political system to non-patricians.

**4**. But even before the "closing" of the patriciate there were signs of trouble.

**B**. In 494 BC the plebs "seceded" from Rome, since their demands for economic and social reform were not met.

**1**. The plebs demanded release from debt, particularly debt-bondage and arbitrary treatment at the hands of the aristocrats.

**2**. They left Rome and formed their own, parallel state on the Janiculum, a nearby hill.

**3**. The "Plebeian State" was modeled on the main, patrician-dominated Republic: it had a council (the *concilium plebis*); it had elected officers (tribunes of the plebs and *aediles* of the plebs); it passed resolutions called *plebiscita*.

**4**. The plebs were now firmly established as a force in Roman politics.

**5**. Exactly how the First Succession was brought to an end is unclear from our sources.

**C**. Subsequent secessions of the plebs forced further reform.

**1**. A crisis in 451--449 revolved around the plebs' demand for codification of the laws.

**2**. A Committee of Ten (*decemviri*) was established to draw up a law code, but it attempted to subvert the Republic and rule as a junta.

**3**. In response, the plebs seceded, the Committee of Ten was ousted, and Rome got its first code of written law, the Twelve Tables, in 449 BC.

**4**. As a result, the Plebeian State earned recognition from the Republic, and was assimilated into it.

**5**. Plebeian demands for land, debt relief, and political equality continued in the ensuing decades, and the plebs were partially successful in having them met.

**6**. By 367 BC the main part of the Struggle of the Orders was over, but the epilogue came only in 287 BC when a law (the *Lex Hortensia*) made *plebiscita* binding on all citizens, patrician and plebeian alike.

**III**. The Struggle of the Orders helped shape the form of the developed Republican government in Rome; it also had important social effects.

**A**. In the evolution of the Roman Republican government, the struggle of the Orders stands out as the major formative influence.

**B**. In the last phases of the Struggle, the Plebeian State came to be assimilated with the Republic.

**C**. New magistracies were created to suit both plebeian and patrician.

**1**. One consul a year was to be plebeian.

**2**. *Curule* (patrician) *aediles* were created to match *aediles* of the plebs.

**3**. A new magistracy, the *praetorship*, was open to both Orders.

**D**. The nature of the Roman ruling class was also transformed by the Struggle.

**1**. With the closing of the patriciate around 450 BC, wealthy non-patricians joined forces with the plebs.

**2**. This transformed the plebeian movement into a socially diverse entity with differing goals: the rich plebs wanted access to the political system, the poorer ones wanted socioeconomic reforms.

**3**. The resolution of the Struggle and the admission of the plebs into the political system created a patrician-plebeian ruling class that was largely unconcerned by the demands of the commoners for reform.

**4**. After 287 BC, the distinction between patrician and plebeian became more socially than politically significant. New lines of stratification began to emerge, but they were tied to Roman imperial expansion.

**Roman Expansion in Italy**

The Roman conquest of Italy, effected between the eighth and third centuries BC, was a long and arduous business. We can chart an outline of this expansion in three phases, which were not without their major reverses for the Romans. We shall also examine the ramifications of Roman expansion for Roman politics and society.

**I**. For the first four centuries of its existence, Rome was occupied with gaining control over Latium.

**A**. The early dealings of Rome with its Latin neighbors are shrouded in obscurity, but they appear varied and complex.

**1**. The sources for the early expansion of Rome are not good. They are full of heroic and patriotic tales that served as models for good behavior in later generations. From the Third Samnite War onwards, however, our material improves considerably.

**2**. The sources depict the kings mixing war and diplomacy in their dealings with the Latins.

**3**. The transition from the monarchy to the Republic weakened the Roman position (see Lars Porsenna), but victory over the Latins at the Battle of Lake Regillus in 499 BC recovered the situation.

**4**. The Treat of Cassius (*foedus Cassianum*) in 493 BC established a new relationship between Rome and the Latins, who were formed into the so-called Latin League.

**5**. The outline of the Treaty seems clear, but the details are not.

**a**. It was a military alliance (non-aggression pact; mutual friends and enemies; equal division of spoils of war).

**b**. Romans were to command any joint forces.

**c**. It is unclear whether Rome was a member of the Latin League or whether the Treaty was a bilateral agreement between Rome and the League.

**B**. The requirements of defense against tribal mountain peoples in the neighborhood of Latium strengthened Rome's position among the Latins.

**1**. The Aequi and Volsci, tribal mountain-dwellers, launched annual raids into Latium between ca. 500 and 440 BC. Rome and the Latins resisted in tandem.

**2**. The continuous warfare strengthened Roman influence over the Latins.

**C**. Incursions into Etruria brought Rome and the Latins close to war when disaster struck from the north. Roman recovery led to the final conquest of Latium.

**1**. In the course of the fifth century, Rome had begun a series of conflicts with Veii, a powerful Etruscan town north of the Tiber.

**2**. In 396 the Romans captured Veii, and took all the spoils for themselves.

**3**. As the Latins were about to fight over their treatment by the Romans, disaster struck from the north.

**4**. Gallic raiders from the Po Valley region, known as Gallia Cisalpina, defeated a combined Roman/Latin force at Allia in 390 BC, and captured Rome.

**5**. The Gallic raid humiliated the Romans, but does not seem to have greatly undermined their overall position.

**6**. Roman incursions into Etruria and Latium continued until 338 BC, when the Romans defeated a combined Latin force and reshaped the Latin League to their own needs.

**II**. The Samnite Wars were on a larger scale than any previously fought by Rome, and Roman victory in the conflicts secured Roman power over all of central Italy.

**A**. The Samnites were formidable opponents.

**1**. The Samnites were a federation of tribal people living in the mountains of central Italy.

**2**. Tough fighting men, they were a warrior society that prized martial skill.

**3**. Initially, they made a non-aggression pact with Rome.

**4**. Samnite raids into Campania caused the inhabitants to appeal to Rome for help in 343 BC.

**5**. The First Samnite War (343--41 BC) ended with renewal of the Romano- Samnite Treaty.

**B**. The encroachment of Roman power on Samnite borders caused the Second Samnite War, an epic struggle that lasted more than twenty years.

**1**. The Romans continued to extend their influence into the outlying regions of Samnium.

**2**. War broke out in 326, and lasted until 304 BC.

**3**. It was a great struggle that tested Roman resolve in the face of catastrophes such as the Caudine Forks in 321 BC.

**4**. By a combination of military operations and diplomacy, the Romans encircled the Samnites in their mountain homeland and forced their surrender.

**5**. The old Roman-Samnite was renewed, but Roman power now extended deep into former Samnite territory.

**C**. The conflict called the Third Samnite War (298 -- 290) was, in fact, the last stand of free Italy in the face of Roman expansion. The Romans' victory gave them complete control over central Italy.

**1**. With the end of the Second Samnite War, free Italians could have no illusions about what the Romans were ultimately aiming for.

**2**. Although sparked by Romans assistance to people attacked by the Samnites, the Third Samnite War became a pan-Italic stand against Roman expansion.

**3**. A coalition of Samnites, Umbrians, Etruscans and Gauls fought the Romans at Sentinum in 295 BC, the largest battle yet fought on Italian soil.

**4**. The Roman victory led to the incorporation of the Samnites into the Roman administration of Italy in 290 BC.

**5**. The Romans were now dominant in central Italy, although some mopping-ip operations continued for several decades.

**III**. Conflict with the Greek colony of Tarentum led to invasion of Pyrrhus of Rome's first overseas enemy.

**A**. Tarentum, pressed by Roman expansion, called upon King Pyrrhus of Epirus for help.

**B**. Tarentum found itself facing Roman power in the 280s BC.

**C**. In conflict with Rome, the Tarentines called upon Pyrrhus of Epirus, who invaded Italy in 281 BC with an army of 25,000 men and 20 elephants.

**D**. Commanding a well-trained and well-equipped army fighting in the formidable Macedonian phalanx formation, Pyrrhus defeated the Romans twice in 280 and 279 BC.

**E**. After a fruitless campaign in Sicily, Pyrrhus returned to mainland Italy in 275 BC, and fought the Romans to a standstill at Beneventum in 275.

**F**. Pyrrhus withdrew to his kingdom, leaving Rome mistress of all of the Italian peninsula south of the Po Valley.

**IV**. The expansion of Rome in Italy carried important ramifications for Roman politics, society, and culture.

**A**. The authority of the senate was greatly increased. Originally an advisory body made up of the wealthiest and most influential Romans, by the time of Pyrrhus' invasion, the senate had become the dominant political entity in the state. This was a consequence of the constant warfare, which placed a premium on experienced commanders.

**B**. There was great economic growth, as reflected in population increases, more building in Rome, increase in luxury goods, increase in the number of slaves, and so on.

**C**. There was cultural change, in the form of greater contacts with the Etruscans and, especially, the Greeks.

**The Roman Confederation in Italy**

Having reviewed the narrative of early Roman military actions in Italy, we must examine how the Romans administered their conquests. The system of administration, generally called the Roman Confederation of Italy, was complex and involved ranking subject communities in a hierarchy of status with regard to their relationship with Rome. The system formed the basis of Roman dealings with other subject peoples who had not yet come under their yoke, and it goes a long way toward explaining the longevity of the Roman Empire.

**1**. The Romans developed early in their history a system of privilege-sharing with allied or related communities that differed from the usually harsh treatment ancient victors showed to their vanquished foes.

**A**. Although the origins of the system are obscure, it seems that the Romans could, under certain conditions, extend the privileges of citizenship to other communities.

**1**. In later years it was not unusual for the Romans to extend the rights of citizenship to other communities.

**2**. This practice appears to have been present very early, as illustrated by the example of Gabii.

**3**. By the third century BC, a secondary citizenship status had emerged, the state without the vote (a citizenship lacking rights of political participation, called c*ivitas sine suffragio*).

**B**. The Romans also embarked on a policy of colonization early in their history. Foundation of colonies was one important diplomatic wing of Roman expansion in Italy.

**1**. Roman colonies were founded in newly conquered territories, and at strategically important locations.

**2**. Colonies were initially comprised of Romans and Latins, the former being the largest group.

**3**. Colonists enjoyed what came to be called "Latin Rights" (*ius Latii*), which was a sort of restricted Roman citizenship.

**4**. The Roman foundation of colonies was carried on in peacetime, but it could be provocative, as when it contributed to the outbreak of the Second Samnite War.

**C**. As Roman power expanded, the Romans developed other degrees of community status (e.g. the "double colonies").

**1**. Beginning with Tusculum in 381 BC, the Romans developed a community status below the colony, called the *municipium*.

**2**. The rights and status of a *municipium* in the early period are unclear, but in later periods the *municipium* comprised local citizens whose ruling classes alone were admitted to Roman citizenship.

**3**. Below the municipium, and especially in south Italy, the Romans established "treaty states" (*civitates foederatae*).

**4**. Treaty states enjoyed only those privileges stipulated in their treaty with Rome.

**II**. The developed Confederation of Italy allowed the Romans to "divide and conquer" the peoples of Italy, and it offered great benefits to the Romans.

**A**. The final form of the Confederation, as it had evolved over centuries, ranked subject communities in a variety of bilateral status-relationships with Rome.

**1**. The final form of the Confederation was as follows: at the top were colonies of Roman citizens (*optima iure*); next came Latin colonies (*ius Latii*); *municipia* stood below the Latin colonies; treaty states (*civitates foederatae*) brought up the rear.

**2**. Within this scheme, the Romans could promote or demote communities depending on circumstances.

**3**. Eventually, these statues could be conferred by the Roman Senate on any community (e.g. colonial or Latin status could be granted to already existing communities).

**B**. These bilateral arrangements effectively divided the Italians among themselves.

**1**. In each case, the agreements were bilateral between Rome and the subject communities, encouraging the locals to look for their welfare.

**2**. Adjacent communities could enjoy widely divergent statuses with Rome, mitigating their capability to act in concert with Rome.

**C**. The system also provided Rome with a large pool of military manpower.

**1**. Whatever the status of the subject community, provision of troops for the army was a universal requirement.

**2**. Rome could therefore impose the basic duty of citizenship, military service, without offering the privileges of citizenship in every case.

**3**. Thus approximately half of the Roman army came from the subject states of the Roman Confederation of Italy.

**III**. This early system of administration of conquered territories had several important long-term consequences.

**A**. It was to play a vital role in facilitating Roman oversea expansion, by virtue of the huge manpower Rome could bring to bear on any given situation.

**B**. In times of crisis, it offered Rome security, as when Pyrrhus failed to detach Rome's allies from the Confederation, or during the Second Punic War, as we shall see.

**C**. When an altered version of the Confederation was extended beyond Italy, it was to form the basis for the stability and longevity of the later Roman Empire.

**The International Scene on the Eve of Roman Expansion**

We shall now focus on the international, geopolitical situation as it stood in 264 BC, on the eve of Rome's rise to an overseas empire. After a preliminary overview of the sources, we see that the Mediterranean world was divided into bases, east and west. Carthage was the dominant power in the west, while in the east a variety of Hellenistic kingdoms competed with each other in the military and diplomatic spheres. Few of these powers could have imagined that land-based Rom was about to emerge from Italy and defeat them all.

**I**. Our sources for Roman history from ca. 270 BC onward improve greatly.

**A**. There are improved literary sources, notably Polybius, Livy, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and Cassius Dio. These writers often had available contemporary, or near-contemporary sources now lost to us.

**B**. There are more frequent inscriptions of all sorts.

**C**. Archaeological evidence becomes more abundant.

**II**. The geopolitical situation in the Mediterranean in c. 270 BC was complex.

**A**. In the western Mediterranean lay Carthage and the Greek colonies on Syracuse.

**1**. Carthage was a powerful mercantile naval state with links throughout the western Mediterranean.

**2**. The Greek colonies on Sicily, especially Syracuse, were ancient and formidable.

**3**. Much of the rest of the west, particularly the hinterland and northern reaches of western Europe, were under tribal societies of Celts and Germans.

**B**. The eastern Mediterranean was the ancient home of civilization.

**1**. The eastern Mediterranean had a history of civilization stretching back 3,000 years.

**2**. Egypt, Syria, Asia Minor (Turkey), and Greece all had long heritages of organized and urbanized statehood.

**3**. The situation in this region in c. 270 BC was itself complex.

**C**. Alexander the Great's conquests had created the Hellenistic kingdoms in this region.

**1**. Alexander's conquest of Persia was followed by turmoil in the eastern lands.

**2**. Alexander's generals view with one another, initially for control of the empire, but later for what part of it they could safely control.

**3**. The result was a balance of power among three mutually antagonistic Hellenistic kingdoms ruled by descendants of Alexander's generals: in Egypt ruled the Ptolemaic Dynasty; in Syria ruled the Seleucids; in the Macedonian homeland ruled the Antigonids.

**4**. In the buffer zones between these major states, smaller kingdoms and federations arose, namely, the Aetolian and Achaean Leagues which held sway in mainland Greece; the Attalid kingdom of Pergamum ruled in northwest Asia Minor; the third entity was the island state of Rhodes.

**III**. In this complex international scene, the rise of Rome in Italy was not a major event.

**A**. For the most part these important and historical states paid little attention to Rome's rise to dominance in Italy.

**B**. There were two exceptions.

**1**. Carthage is reported to have made three treaties with Rome in 509, 348, and 306 BC.

**2**. These treaties, particularly the earliest, are disputed, but they appear to have been designed to protect Carthaginian interests in Italy.

**3**. In 273 BC, the Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt declared "friendship" with Rome, clearly a response to Pyrrhus' failure in Italy. This ensured the survival of Ptolemaic Egypt until 31 BC.

**C**. There was little indication in ca. 270 BC that Rome was on the brink of conquering the entire Mediterranean basin, which it would do in little more than 100 years.

**1**. The superpowers were Egypt and Syria in the east and Carthage in the west.

**2**. Rome had a naval capacity, but it was not a major naval power.

**3**. Rome had a coastal defense navy, and had even fought some naval battles, but did not compare with the other big powers, including Rhodes and especially Carthage.

**4**. Carthage became the first adversary of expanding Rome.