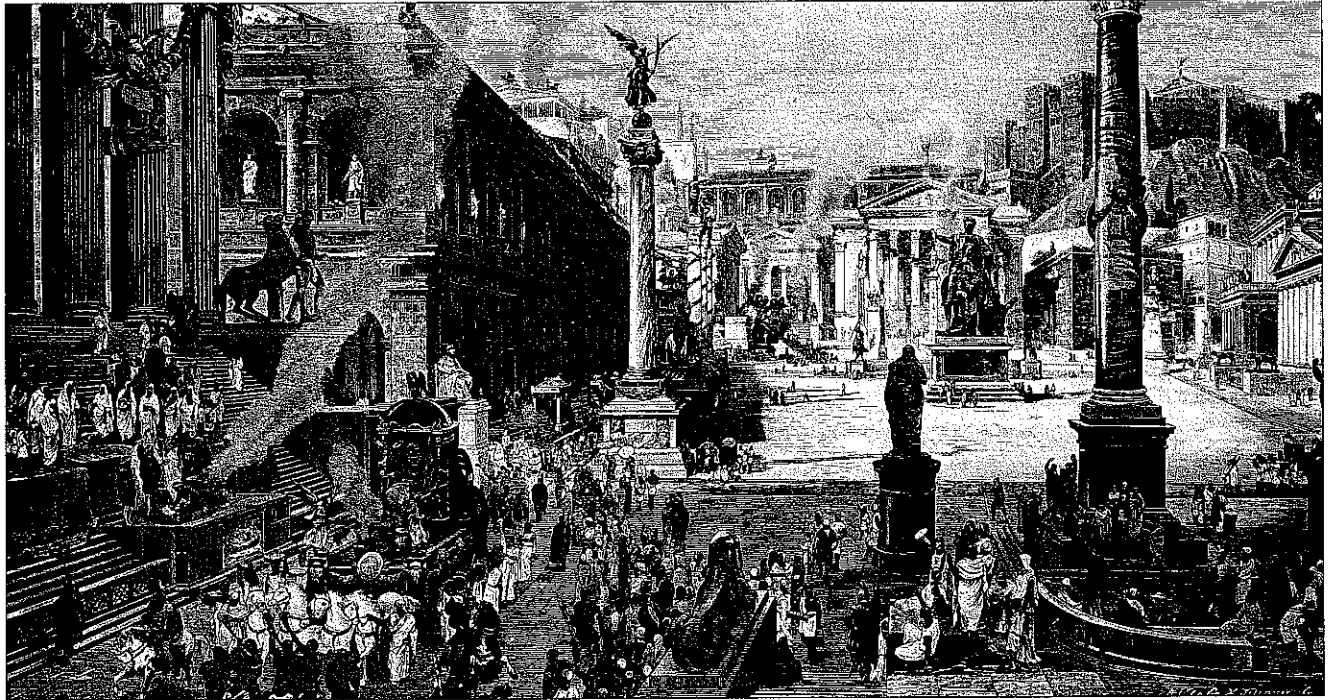


The Rise of Rome

Romans believed their city originated with gods and heroes, but what were the real origins of its greatness?



THIS 19TH CENTURY ENGRAVING SHOWS ROME AT ITS PEAK, WITH THE FOCUS ON THE FORUM. THE FORUM WAS BUILT ON THE SITE OF A MARKETPLACE THAT HAD BEEN THE CITY'S CENTER SINCE 8TH CENTURY BC. RIGHT, A RELIEF SCULPTURE SHOWS ROMAN SOLDIERS ENGAGED IN BATTLE.

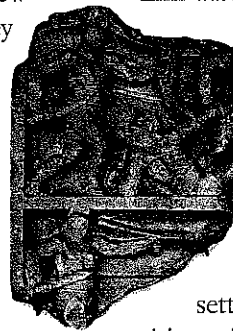
ANCIENT ROME GLORIED IN ITS MYTHIC ORIGINS. According to legend, the city was founded in 753 BC by twin brothers, Romulus and Remus, offspring of the god Mars and a vestal virgin named Sylvia. A villainous usurper threw the twins in the River Tiber, but they were washed ashore and cared for by a she-wolf. After many vicissitudes, the twins were returned to their grandfather. Later, Romulus killed Remus in a dispute over the best site for a settlement, then established the city that still bears his name.

Seven centuries later, Virgil adapted another legend about Rome's origins for his epic poem *The Aeneid*. It told the story of Aeneas, who fled from Troy after it had been destroyed by the Greeks. Aeneas's adventurous wanderings led him to Italy, where he received a prophetic vision of Roman history from the

spirit of his dead father, Anchises. Aeneas's mother was the goddess Venus, and he was a forebear of Romulus and Remus. Virgil's version of this story satisfied Rome's dream of a link with the divine world. It was also a paean to the Emperor Augustus and the newly created Roman Empire.

BEYOND LEGEND

In reality, Rome had humble beginnings. About 1000 BC, herdsman settled in the region of present-day Rome. By the 7th century BC, their settlements combined into larger communities, of which Rome became the dominant center. At this time, the city fell under the benign control of Italy's chief power, the Etruscans, whose culture and language had a vital impact on the city. Greek culture, also introduced by the Etruscans, cast an even more



enduring spell over the Romans. Despite these influences, Rome developed its own institutions. In 509 BC, the Romans created a republican form of government that lasted 500 years.

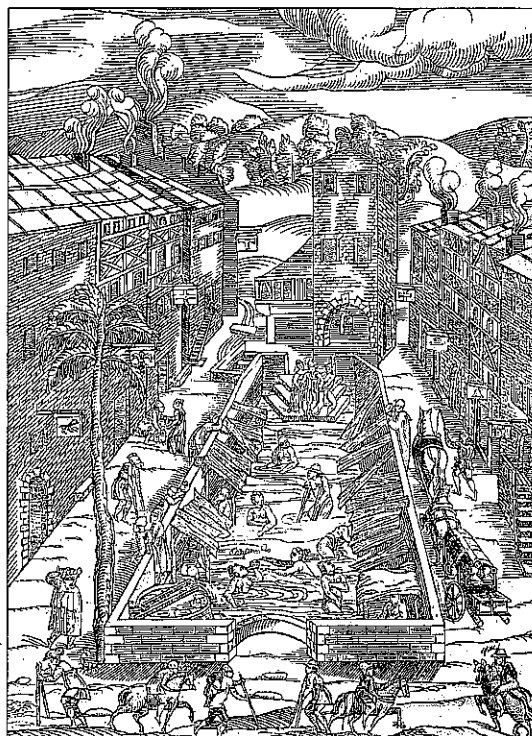
The early Republic preserved the Romans' simple rural way of life. Unlike their neighbors, they were a hard-working people who resisted the corrupting effects of ease and luxury. Their disciplined attitude helped them to assert control over the weaker states in the rest of Italy.

In a conflict over Sicily, Rome clashed with the North African power Carthage, waging intermittent warfare with the Carthaginians from 264 to 146 BC. The worst time came when invading Carthaginians, led by Hannibal, wreaked havoc throughout Italy. But Rome would survive, crush Carthage, and gain control of the western Mediterranean.

PATRICIANS AND PLEBIANS

The Republic was initially controlled by the patricians (aristocrats). But the plebians (commoners) acquired their own elected leaders. The plebian leaders were discredited after their defeats during the Carthaginian invasions, and patrician generals, who saved Rome, took over as political leaders. The Senate, which made the republican system work, retained the right to appoint generals, but found it best to have these bellicose commanders fighting wars abroad in order to avoid conflict in Rome.

With its relentless war machine, Rome conquered Greece and the eastern Mediterranean, and its boundaries soon stretched from Egypt to the English Channel. Fabulous plunder poured into the capital, but its effect was disastrous: It opened up a vast gap between rich and



AN ANCIENT ROMAN BATH IN PLOMBIERS, FRANCE IS SHOWN IN A MID-16TH CENTURY WOODCUT.

poor. Troubles grew as the Republic gave way to civil strife and military dictatorship. Julius Caesar seized power, but his plans to reorganize the government alarmed the Senate.

The assassination of Caesar by a senatorial clique in 44 BC was supposed to bring about a return to republican government. Instead, it sparked a civil war, in which Caesar's adopted son, Augustus, triumphed. Although he kept some republican forms, he set up an empire with himself as emperor in 27 BC. As foretold in *The Aeneid*, Augustus gave Rome peace—a despotic peace—which lasted two centuries. When it ended in the late 2nd century AD, Rome's decline and downfall began.

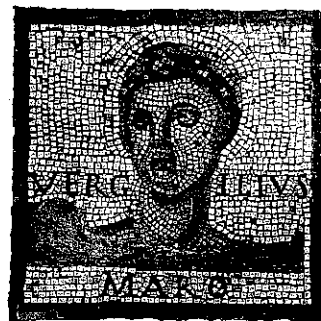
VIRGIL THE INFLUENTIAL

Virgil, the great Roman poet who wrote of Rome's legendary founding in *The Aeneid*, gained even greater influence after the Roman Empire had crumbled. In some of his poems, titled *The Eclogues* and published 30 years before the birth of Jesus, he wrote about the birth of a divine baby who would usher in a new age.

Considered by Christian scholars to be a prophet, Virgil and his works became a cornerstone of education up through the Renaissance. Writers would practice prophecy by interpreting Virgilian passages. The Roman poet also had an influence on writers throughout history: Dante used him as his guide



through Hell in the *Inferno*, and John Milton imitated his style in his own epic writing. Thought to be more than a prophet—also a magician and necromancer—the poet's original name, Vergil, was changed by his loyal students to the common spelling Virgil—meaning soothsayer.



A ROMAN MOSAIC CAPTURES THE GREAT POET VIRGIL (OR VERGIL), WHO LIVED DURING THE REIGN OF AUGUSTUS.

The Origins of Roman Cultural Values (Overview)

Like so many other great civilizations, Roman society engaged in a process of cultural borrowing and adaptation throughout its long history from small provincial power to dominant empire. The Romans were particularly indebted to the Greeks and Etruscans. As they fought, subdued, and then colonized these two civilizations, they also learned much from their religious, cultural, and political thought, adopting and adapting those beliefs to suit their needs. In that way, many of Rome's most important cultural values were decisively shaped by the influence of the older, neighboring societies.

Etruscan Influences

The Romans were heavily influenced by the Etruscans, a non-Indo-European people who had settled in the central Italian regions of modern Tuscany and Umbria by 700 BC. Indeed, the Etruscans ruled over the Romans from 616 BC until the founding of the Roman Republic in 509 BC, making cultural borrowing from the overlords an accomplished fact. From the Etruscans, the Romans borrowed many important innovations with which they are credited today. For example, the Romans derived their alphabet from the Etruscans, whose own language is still only partially understood by modern scholars. That alphabet, also modified by the Etruscans (who borrowed a version of it from the Greeks), continues to be utilized today throughout the world by speakers of many of the European languages. The alphabet fit within the Roman language—Latin—as easily as it fit into Etruscan linguistics.



From the Etruscans, the Romans also borrowed many cultural symbols and pastimes. Some of the most popular, and today most associated with the Romans, were the gladiatorial games. Although elevated to mass entertainment by the Romans many centuries later, the Etruscans were the first to introduce the spectacle of the gladiatorial ring to their Latin neighbors. The Etruscans also bequeathed religious beliefs to the Romans, particularly those of divination. Believing that the future could be foretold by seers who read cryptic messages in animal entrails and in the flight paths of birds, the Romans adopted that belief, also known as auspice, from the Etruscans. Etruscans also taught the Romans methods of constructing large statues of their gods, as well as how to build stable arches, a mainstay of later Roman architecture. Moreover, drainage, especially of marshlands, was perfected by the Etruscans, who passed that knowledge on to the Romans.

Adaptations from the Greeks

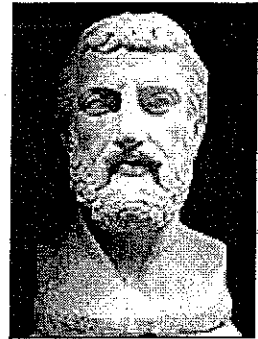


The amount of cultural and practical knowledge the Romans absorbed from the Etruscans was great. However, they borrowed from the Greeks as well, and it was in the context of Greek influence that many of the most striking aspects of cultural borrowing, or syncretism, can be found in Roman society. The most extensive example may be that of Greek religion, which found its way into the hearts of Romans so deeply that worship of the Greek deities became a major part of the Roman state religion.

Another important value of the Greeks, reminiscent of Etruscan and Latin thought as well, was that of the *oikos*, or self-sufficient household. Greek patriarchs held the ideal that their *arete*, or honor, was measured in part by their ability to manage their extended household as a strong patriarchal figure. In many ways, that ideal influenced a central Roman tenet, that of the supremacy of the *paterfamilias*, or father of the family. For the Romans, honor was measured in large part by the *paterfamilias*' ability to maintain authority over his wife and children, as well as

slaves. Indeed, the family was the venue in which children learned obedience to authority, a trait that would serve them well when facing the potent power of the Roman state.

The Greek philosophical school of Stoicism was also very influential in shaping another Roman value, that of *virtus*, or proper masculinity. For the Romans, an ideal man was strong, simple, and close to the values of the land, despite the increasingly urban nature of Rome. The early rural roots of the Romans were idealized into a martial definition of manhood, combined with the Stoic values of *logos*, or the rational order of everything in the universe. The marriage of *virtus* with *logos* meant that Romans were bound to accept their fate—a belief to which the Romans held fast throughout their history—and bear their roles in life with unquestioned acceptance.



The Legacy of Cultural Borrowing and Adaptation

Despite the fact that the Romans owed such a cultural debt to the Greeks, they considered the Greeks an inferior people, members of a culture that they had defeated and absorbed. Nevertheless, Greek learning, literature, and values permeated many aspects of Roman life, to the point that modern historians often refer to Greco-Roman civilization in one breath. Moreover, the Etruscans, too, were reviled by the Romans, particularly after their revolution against the Etruscans in the sixth century BC, yet the Romans were highly influenced by them as well. Perhaps one of the most important lessons to be learned in studying the Romans is that great civilizations rarely emerge spontaneously. Rather, they develop slowly, in response to the cultural values around them, and through a process of absorption, rejection, and modification of the status quo.

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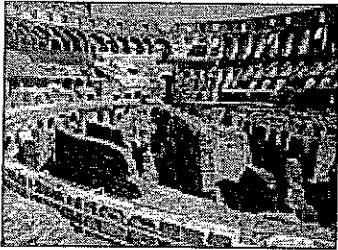
The Origins of Roman Cultural Values: Discussion

1. In the stories of Lucretia, Publius Horatius Cocles, and Gaius Mucius Scaevola, why do you think violence played such a prominent role? Can you think of other examples from the Roman era that embody the values of *paterfamilias* and *virtus*?
2. If the Romans considered the Greeks and Etruscans as inferior, how would you explain the influence those two cultures had on Roman culture and values?
3. How do you think the typical Roman would have described the ideal Roman woman and ideal Roman man, based on what you know from Livy's account of the revolt against the Etruscans?

Life in Rome, the Seat of Empire (Overview)

For many people, thoughts of the ancient Roman capital conjure up dramatic scenes of public spectacles; modern films and literature have promoted the image of Rome as a location of nonstop entertainment. Close historical investigation does show that the Romans enjoyed many exciting amusements, but they also wrestled with the difficulties of life in a crowded metropolis. Life in ancient Rome could be exciting, but it could also be hectic and even precarious at times.

The Flavian Amphitheater

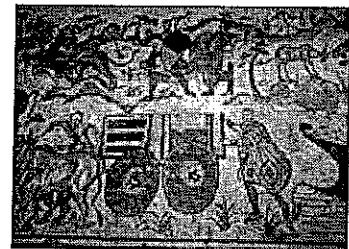


One of the most exciting locales in imperial Rome was the Flavian Amphitheater, better known as the Colosseum. Commissioned in AD 69 during the reign of the Flavian emperor Vespasian and finished during the reign of Titus in 80, tradition maintains that the Colosseum earned its name from a "colossal" statue of Roman emperor Nero that was located nearby. The building of the Colosseum was prompted by the lack of a permanent Roman amphitheater to stage gladiatorial games, which Vespasian hoped to rectify. Within eight years, the enormous building was erected, created from more than 100,000 cubic meters of travertine blocks that were held together by iron rods. Upon its initiation, Romans enjoyed 100 days of celebratory games to commemorate the new, permanent location for their gladiatorial events.

Throughout its long history of spectacles, the Colosseum hosted countless matches between gladiators, baited animals, and other competitions of force, as well as mock naval battles, chariot races, and other martial events. Capable of holding about 50,000 spectators, the Colosseum became the centerpiece for Roman entertainment for many generations. However, it was subject to several devastating natural disasters, including earthquakes, lightning strikes, and fires. Nevertheless, Roman emperors restored and maintained the Colosseum for several centuries; gladiatorial games were not banned until 404, and animal baiting in the Colosseum continued until 523.

Panem et Circenses

The immense popularity of the Colosseum points to only one of many public venues enjoyed by the ancient Romans. Prior to the construction of the Colosseum, Romans reveled at the Circus Maximus, a gigantic hippodrome known as the most colossal sporting facility in history. Holding upwards of 150,000 people (some sources put the number as high as 250,000) at any one time, the oval-shaped Circus Maximus hosted chariot races and other military-style competitions from the sixth century BC until the mid-sixth century AD. Even today, no sporting arena has been built to hold as many spectators as the Circus Maximus of Rome.



As the Colosseum, the Circus Maximus, and countless smaller venues attest, the Romans were an enthusiastic crowd, ever ready for bigger and grander spectacle. Indeed, at the dawning of the Imperial period under Augustus, there were at least 77 days per year dedicated to the games, while later emperors called upwards of 100 days of games per year. The Roman satirist Juvenal ridiculed the games as merely "bread and circuses" ("*panem et circenses*"), meaning that the people of Rome were happy to forget their larger troubles when experiencing the entertainment the imperial games granted them. That statement rang true for many Romans who, when not enjoying the excitement of the chariot races or gladiatorial games, were forced to cope with the stressful existence of living in an often brutal metropolis.

Urban Struggles and Benefits

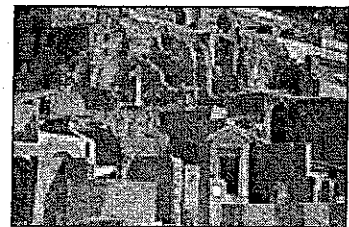


With its burgeoning population, imperial Rome suffered from significant class conflicts. For example, while the upper classes lived in spectacular villas, the majority of the population lived in less comfortable wooden tenements, many of which burned down during the frequent fires that swept through the city. Also, it was common for epidemics to strike the congested urban center of Rome, making life precarious for those unable to withstand disease. Poverty and crime, too, were commonplace in Rome, an image rarely portrayed in modern depictions of the "eternal city."

Nevertheless, for many Romans, the city was the hub of their life: the center of business, entertainment, and citizenship. This latter aspect of life in Rome, that of citizenship, was paramount to a Roman man's sense of belonging to the civic body. Confirmed by the census that was taken every five years, citizenship marked the free man from the slave in Rome, as well as a man from a woman or child. It was citizenship that legally defined a Roman, and becoming a citizen was a goal of many who were brought into the empire, either as slaves or by territorial conquest. That such mobility was possible set Rome apart from other ancient societies, like many of the Greek city-states, where citizenship was not attainable unless it was passed on through birth into the proper social group.

The Forum as Symbol of Civic Life

Civic activity in the Roman Forum, the political and economic center of Roman life, was not restricted to citizens alone. The location of shopping plazas, open markets, many temples, and innumerable gathering places for political and social debate, the forum was another definitive aspect of public life in Rome. Packed with crowds throughout the day, the forum became an important meeting ground for the many classes of Romans, all taking part in the social and economic life of the city simultaneously. With its immense diversity of people, myriad shops, and religious and social activities, the forum is perhaps the best symbol for examining Roman public life, for, in its many facets, it encapsulates the multiplicity of Roman experiences of daily life, regardless of station.



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Life in Rome, the Seat of Empire: Discussion

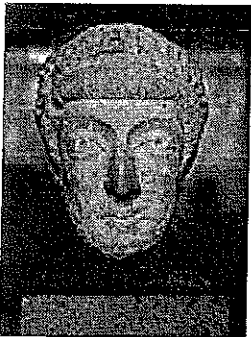
1. What do you think might explain the Romans' love of blood sports?
2. Do you agree with Juvenal that the games provided "bread and circuses" to distract the populace from more pressing concerns, or were the games a necessary social outlet that brought Romans of all classes together as fans?
3. How would you compare screen depictions of gladiators (in such films as *Spartacus* and Ridley Scott's *Gladiator*) with what you know about the historical reality of life as a fighter in the Circus Maximus and the Colosseum?

The Transformation of the Roman Army (Overview)

The incorporation of new peoples was customary throughout Rome's long history. Much of Roman success in expanding its borders came from the unique attitude Romans had towards the inclusion of non-Romans. Unlike many cultures, Rome often made new peoples full legal citizens. Sometimes the inclusion of others was friendly and formal, like the amalgamation of the early Italic tribes in Latium (from the sixth through fourth centuries BC), and at other times, it was the result of conquest, as it was in Gaul (ca. 50 BC). In the last two centuries BC, as Rome expanded into the lands around the Mediterranean Sea and beyond, the Roman Army began to incorporate native units, or *auxilia*, to supplement its forces. In that way, many non-Romans participated in Roman culture.

The Fourth and Fifth Centuries A.D.: A New Approach to Settlement

During the late Roman Republic and early Roman Empire, the auxiliary system worked well, but in the fourth and fifth centuries AD, there were frequently problems with Germanic units, particularly among the Goths. Most often, those soldiers fought under their own commanders, unlike traditional auxiliaries, and in their own fashion, rather than adopting Roman tactics. Independent command, the large number of Goths, and the fact that the emperor's attention was focused on so many different places allowed for innovations in settling the Goths, who sought admission into the empire. Whereas before newcomers might be settled as *coloni*, who were tied to the land, the Goths were given land on very good terms, and significantly, in one region. Rome had normally desired to divide any potentially dangerous tribe into separate settlements to reduce the chance of dangerous revolt.



Rome needed troops, and the Goths were good fighters, so coming to mutually agreeable terms made sense, even if it meant granting concessions that the emperor might not usually have granted. Rome had a lot to offer the Goths in addition to safety. Rome possessed land, good opportunities for trade, and prestige for those Germanic leaders who enjoyed close connections with the imperial government. Some Germanic leaders disliked Rome, some actively sought its friendship, and still others, like Alaric, sometimes sided with Rome and sometimes against as it suited them. For example, after the death of Roman emperor Theodosius I in 395, there were two emperors, one in the east and one in the west, and Alaric often played one against the other in an attempt to improve his situation.

The Complex Nature of Identity: The Example of the Tervingi

Roman relations with the Goths were complex, as the case of the Tervingi tribe and their leader Athanaric reveals. The Tervingi illuminate more than the military situation that many so-called barbarian peoples found themselves in with Rome; they also reveal insights into how each side defined themselves and each other. Religion, culture, and politics all shaped those definitions. In the 330s, the Tervingi, who had been at war with Rome, made peace. Ulfilas, a Goth who became a Christian missionary, began spreading Christianity, and Roman culture made other inroads as well. However, for some Goths like Athanaric, who had long fought against Rome, Christianity was a mark of Roman culture, and thus, of the enemy. Ulfilas, like many Christians, was driven out of Gothic territory in the 340s during a persecution of Christians by Goths hostile to Rome. In the late 360s, war between Athanaric and Rome broke out again, but a stopgap peace was concluded between the Gothic leader and the Eastern Roman emperor Valens.

Then, in the 370s, the Huns advanced steadily into Gothic territory and defeated Athanaric near the Danube River in 376. After that loss, Athanaric's rival, the Gothic leader Fritigern, who supported Christianity, convinced Emperor Valens to let the Tervingi settle in the Roman Empire to escape the Huns. The majority of the Tervingi withdrew

from Athanaric's cabal and followed Fritigern into imperial territory, where many of them were required to serve in the Roman Army. Athanaric considered taking his remaining followers into the empire, but the requirement to become a Christian deterred him, and he ended up settling in Transylvania. Fritigern, meanwhile, led a Gothic rebellion against the Eastern Roman Empire, culminating in his stunning victory at the Battle of Adrianople, during which Valens was killed. Fritigern then turned his attention to Athanaric; he drove his rival out of Transylvania and into exile in 380. Athanaric, who had once sworn an oath never to walk on Roman soil, sought asylum in Constantinople, where he was well received in 381 by Valens' successor, Theodosius. Athanaric died two weeks later.



As the examples of the Tervingi and Athanaric show, a single tribe might have a complex relationship with Rome, at times peaceful, at others hostile. Most Goths, for example, saw Christianity as a sign of *Romanitas* ("Romanness"), but the value placed on sharing in that Roman world varied. To men like Athanaric, anything Roman, including Christianity, was foreign, not Gothic, and thus suspect. To Fritigern's people, however, being identified as Roman was positive, for it helped them find new homes within Roman territory. Furthermore, military service was very often the first step on the road to full citizenship, so in time, Goths might become as Roman as past immigrants had. For the Tervingi, as with many Germanic peoples, their identity as Goths coexisted with a sense of themselves as Romans. While retaining their language and many customs, some might adopt Christianity, fight for Rome, and perhaps even settle in Roman lands.



Differing Definitions

The case of the Tervingi also shows that modern definitions of identity are inappropriate for the ancient world. Where many today speak of "race," ancient Romans and Germanic peoples looked more to birth and culture. For example, to the writer Sidonius Apollinaris, a well-educated, well-born Roman, most Germanic peoples were rustic, unrefined, often illiterate, and more often, violent. They were "barbarians," a term that signified one outside of the settled, urban culture of the Greco-Roman world. Conversely, some Romans served under Germanic leaders quite happily, like the scholar Cassiodorus, who worked for Theodoric, the Ostrogothic king of Italy. Cassiodorus' *Variae*, a collection of official letters, reveal that Romans and Germanic peoples could coexist and work together.



Many Germanic leaders who rose to prominence in the empire, like Flavius Stilicho, faced suspicion throughout their careers, yet there were a large number of such men commanding Roman armies, which suggests that, by and large, it was acceptable for Germanic men to lead Roman troops. While Rome valued the military ability of the Germanic peoples, the Germanic peoples, like most "barbarians," valued Rome too: the empire provided new land to settle; a great model for rule, one that was far more stable than the military nature of Germanic rule; and imperial offices, like *magister militum* ("master of the soldiers"), which brought great honor to Germanic leaders. Identity for both Romans and Goths was a matter of perspective and experience. Few Romans might see themselves as barbarian, but it was possible to be both Roman and barbarian—they were not mutually exclusive terms.

The Transformation of the Roman Army: Discussion

1. In what ways did the incorporation of Germanic peoples into the military benefit the Roman Empire? In what ways did their incorporation adversely affect the empire?
2. How did educated Romans define themselves? How did they define "barbarians?" How did barbarians view the Romans?
3. In what ways did the influx of Germanic peoples change the Roman Empire? In what ways did the Roman Empire change the Germanic peoples? (This question asks you to look beyond the military changes and explore the ways that the empire changed in terms of politics, culture, geography, etc.)