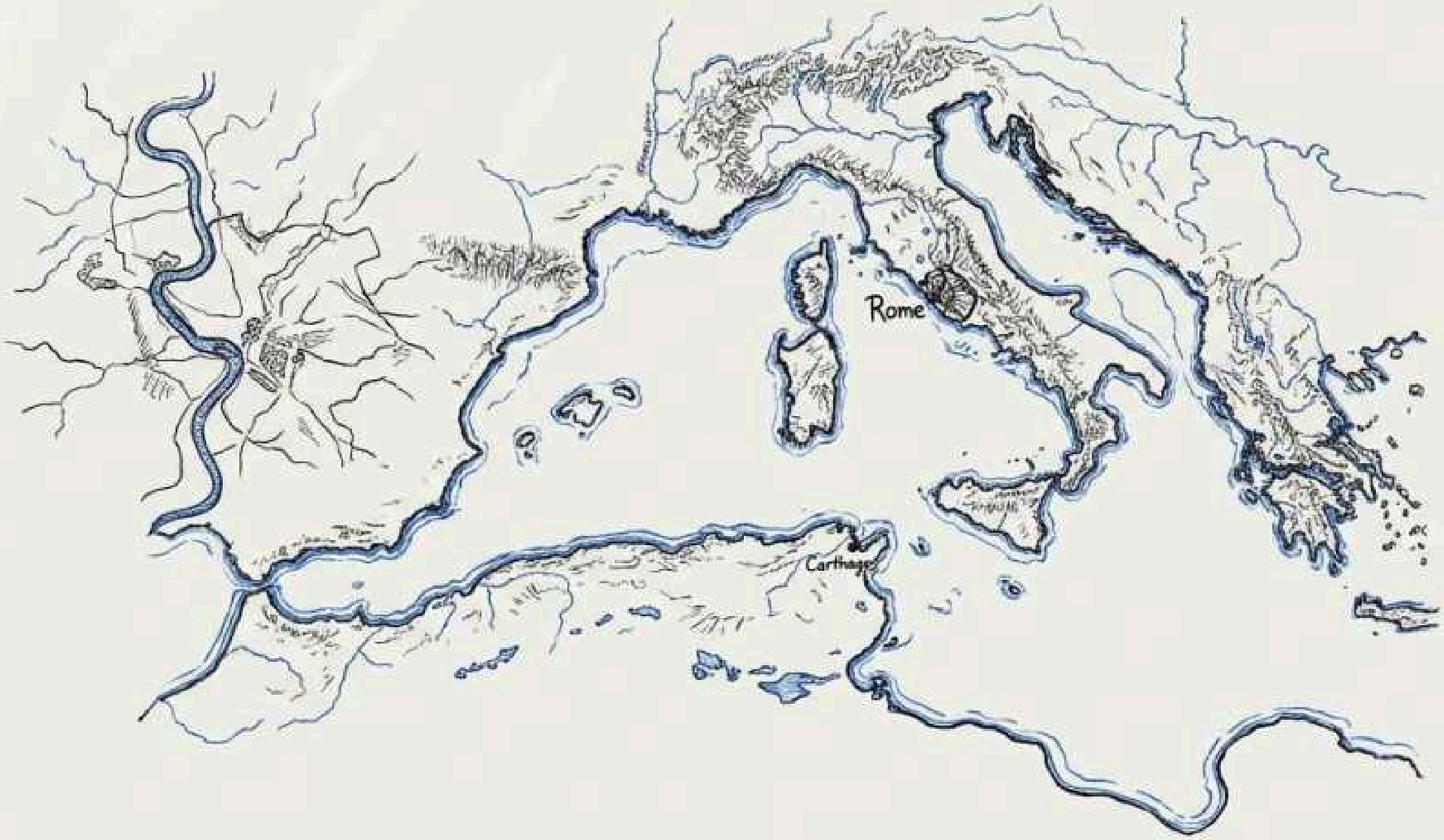
Rome: From City to Mediterranean Power

¶ 4.1

Small Town on the Tiber → Republic → Mediterranean Ruler



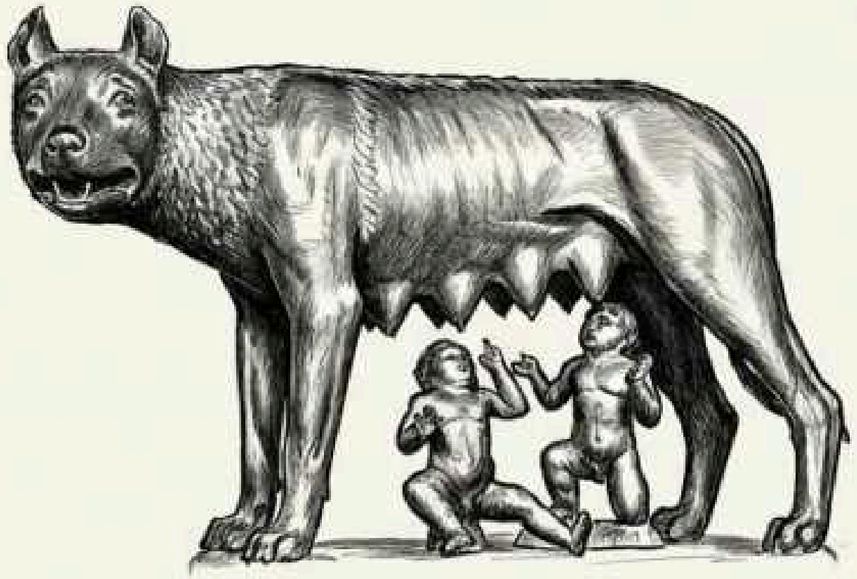
Lecture Roadmap

- ☐ Origins & Myths
- ☐ The Republic's Engine & Social Struggle
- ☐ The Conquest of Italy
- ☐ The Wars with Carthage
- ☐ The Strains of Conquest

Founding Theories: Myth vs. Matter

Tradition

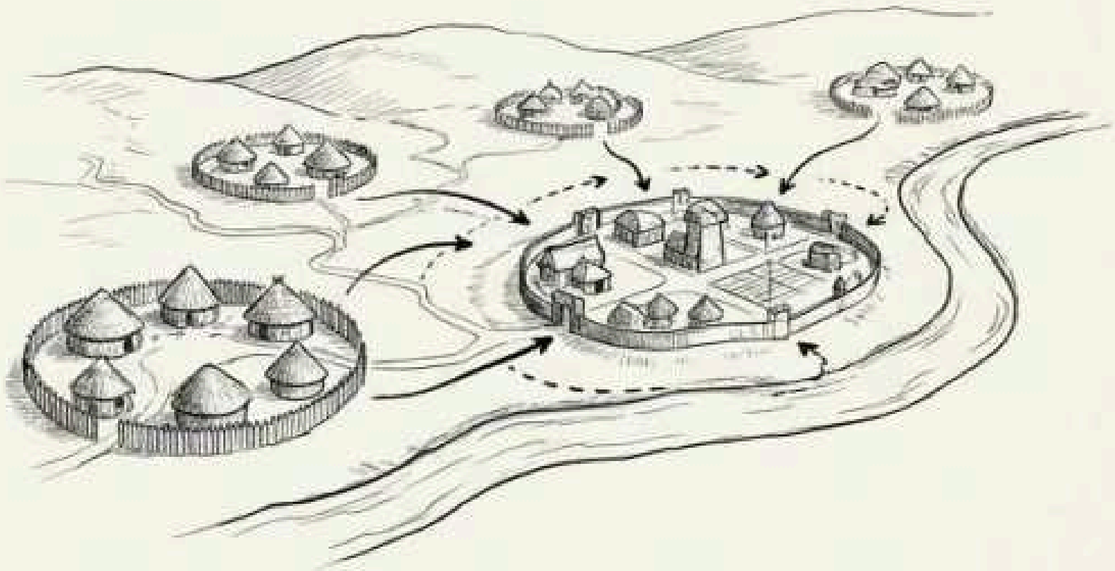
753 BCE



- Romulus (killed twin brother Remus)
- Aeneas (refugee from Troy)

Archaeology

8th–7th Century BCE



- Tiber river villages gradually unify
- Organic growth into a single town

509 BCE: The Birth of the Res Publica

¶ 4.3

7 Kings → Expulsion → Republic

(Final: Tarquin the Proud) (509 BCE)

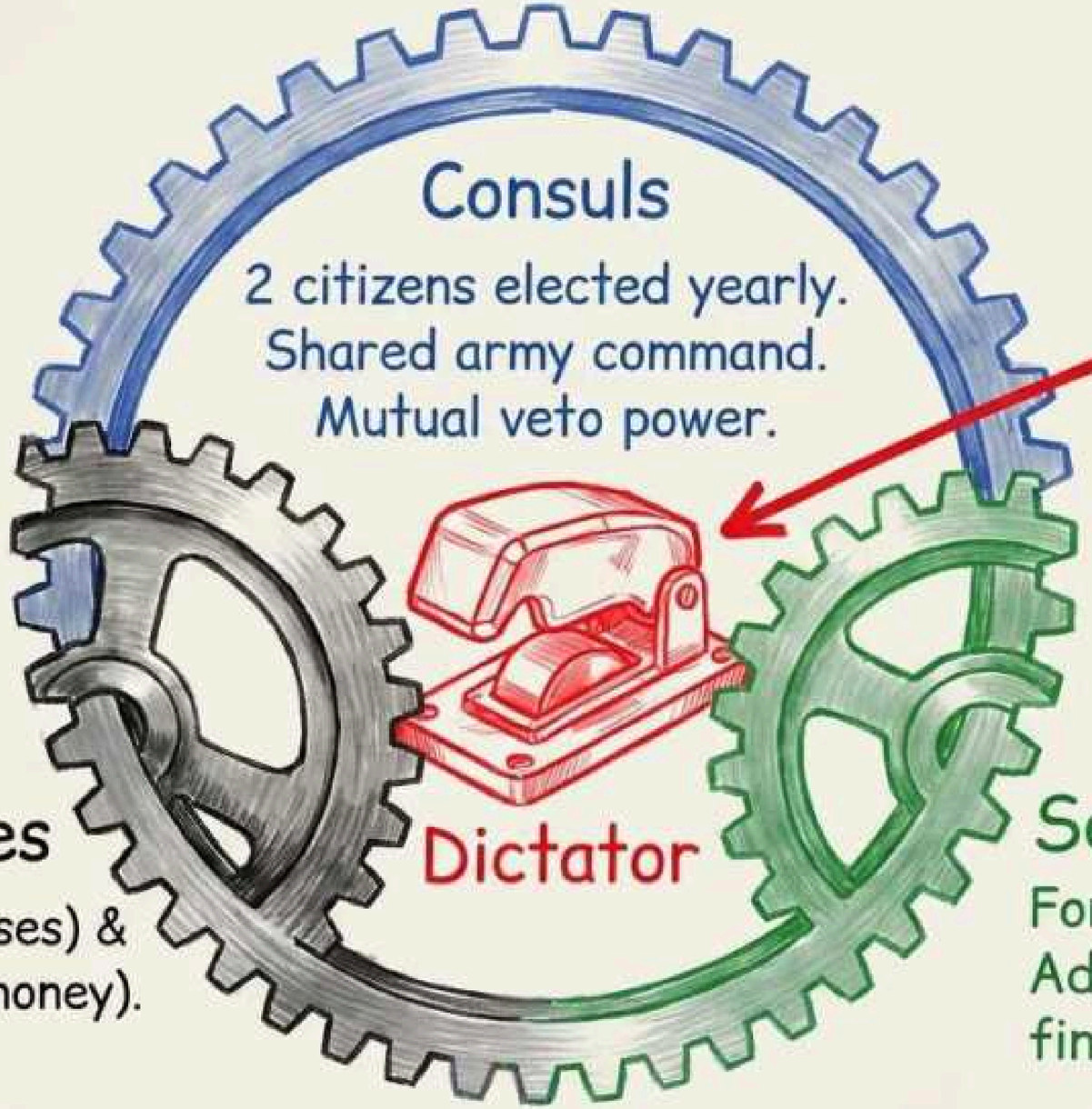


Res Publica = The Public Thing

Note: Historians suspect this change was gradual and dates are traditional, but the outcome is absolute: Romans forever after hated the idea of a king.

The Engine of the State

¶ 4.4



Consuls

2 citizens elected yearly.
Shared army command.
Mutual veto power.

Can be named in a crisis for up to 6 months max.

Dictator

Magistrates

Praetors (judges cases) &
Quaestors (handles money).

Senate

Former magistrates.
Advises and controls finance/foreign policy.

The Conflict of the Orders

¶ 4.5



Patricians
Hereditary upper class

Plebeians
Common citizens

The Leverage

Plebeians threaten mass strike and and withdrawal from Rome.

The Concessions

1. Creation of Tribunes (Power to VETO actions against plebeians).
2. The Twelve Tables (~450 BCE): Rome's very first written laws.

A Changing, Yet Bound Society

¶ 4.6

Legislative Wins

Right to marry Patricians

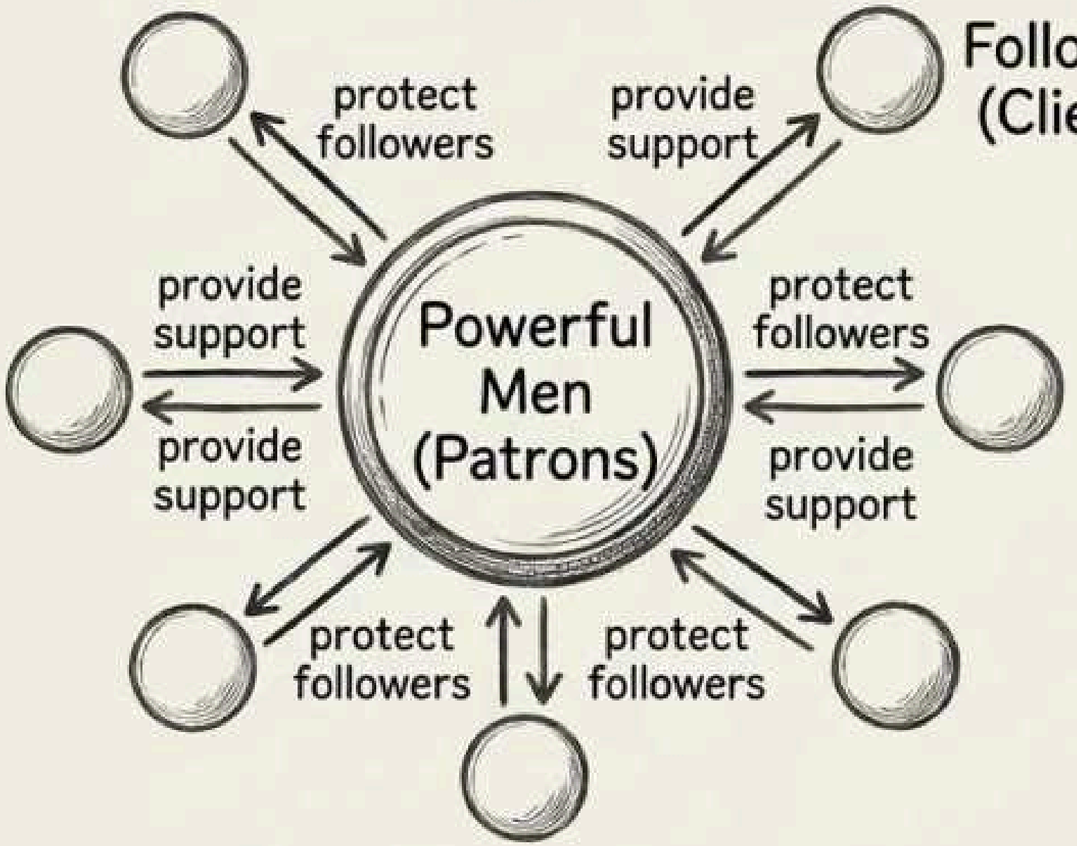
↓

Access to Consulship (367 BCE)

↓

Laws passed by Plebeians binding on everyone (287 BCE)

The Social Web: Patron-Client System

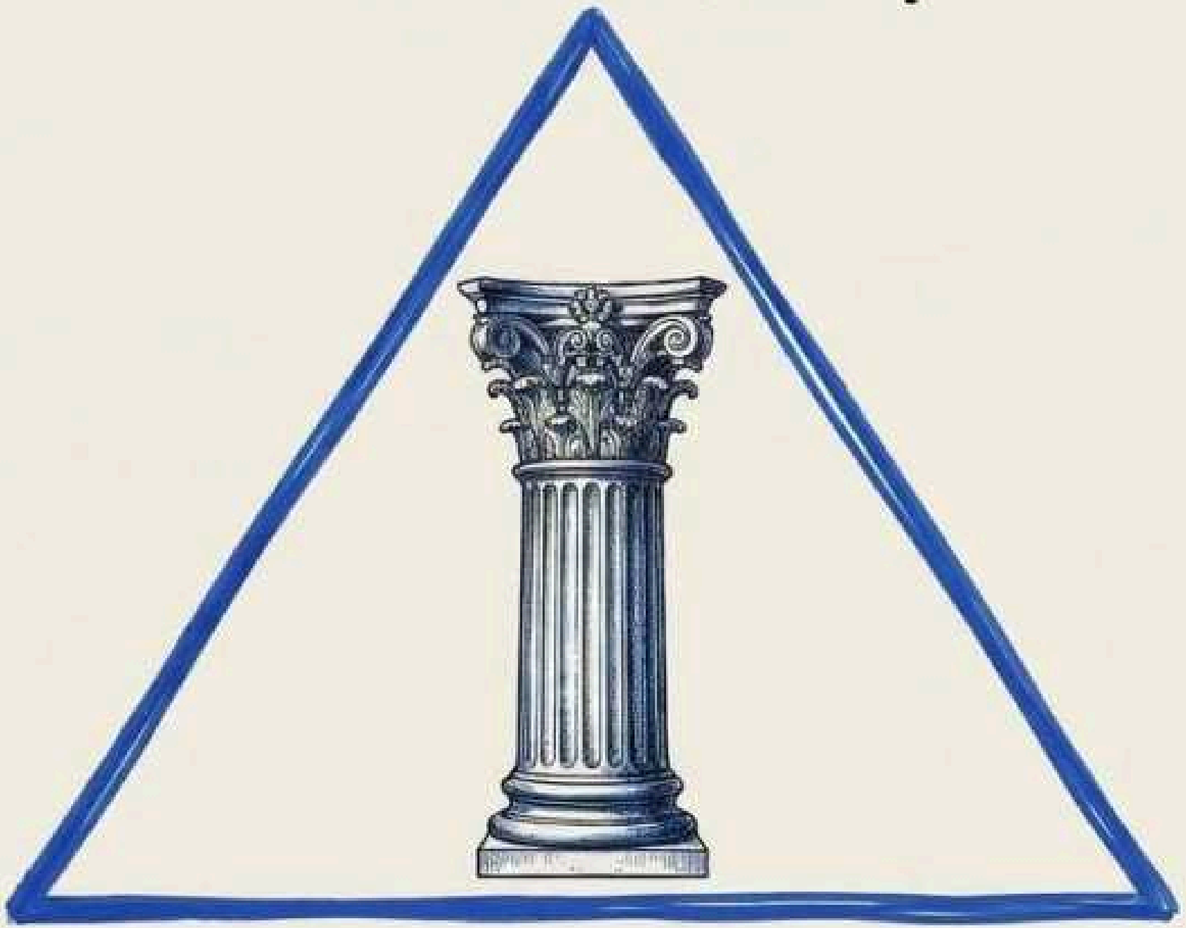


Despite legal wins, power remained in a small circle of wealthy families bound by these cross-rank ties.

The Secret to Success: A Mixed Constitution

¶ 4.7

Consuls ≈ Monarchy



Assemblies ≈ Democracy

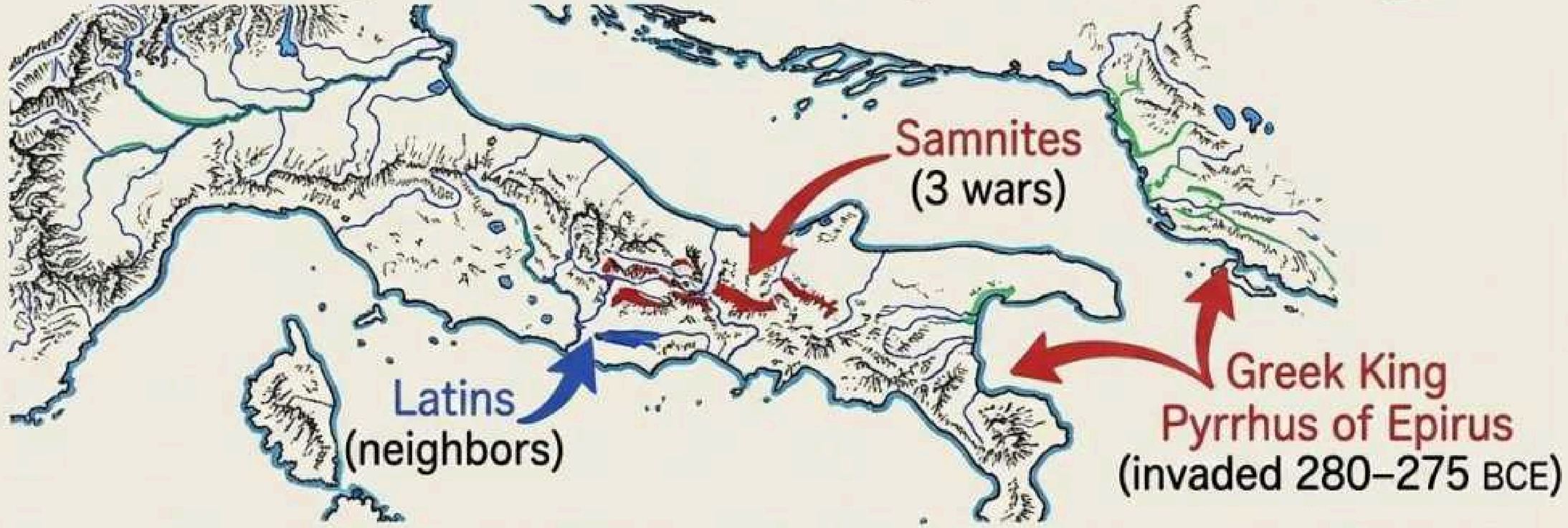
Senate ≈ Aristocracy

The Insight:

The Greek historian Polybius (2nd c. BCE) observed that mutual mutual checking prevented decay, explaining Rome's massive rise. (Later admired by designers of modern governments).

Securing the Peninsula (by 264 BCE)

¶ 4.8



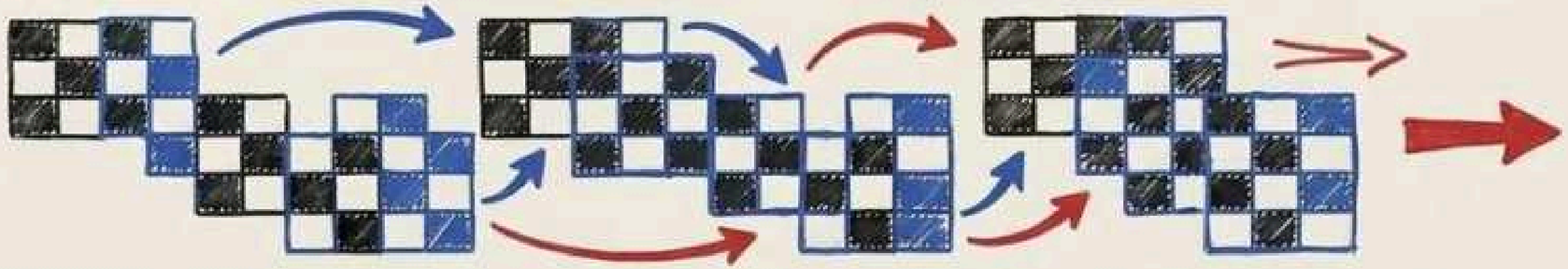
Roman Integration Strategy

Defeat → Treaties → (Obligatory Troop Supply + Grants of Citizenship) ≠ Just Taxation

By 264 BCE, Rome controlled the entire peninsula south of the Po River.

A Society Organized for War

¶ 4.9



Composition:
Army of land-owning citizen-soldiers.

Tactics: Evolved from flexible maniples to larger legions.



Logistics & Discipline:
Severe discipline; soldiers built fortified camps every single night.

Rapid troop/messenger movement via roads.

Infrastructure: The Appian Way (begun 312 BCE)

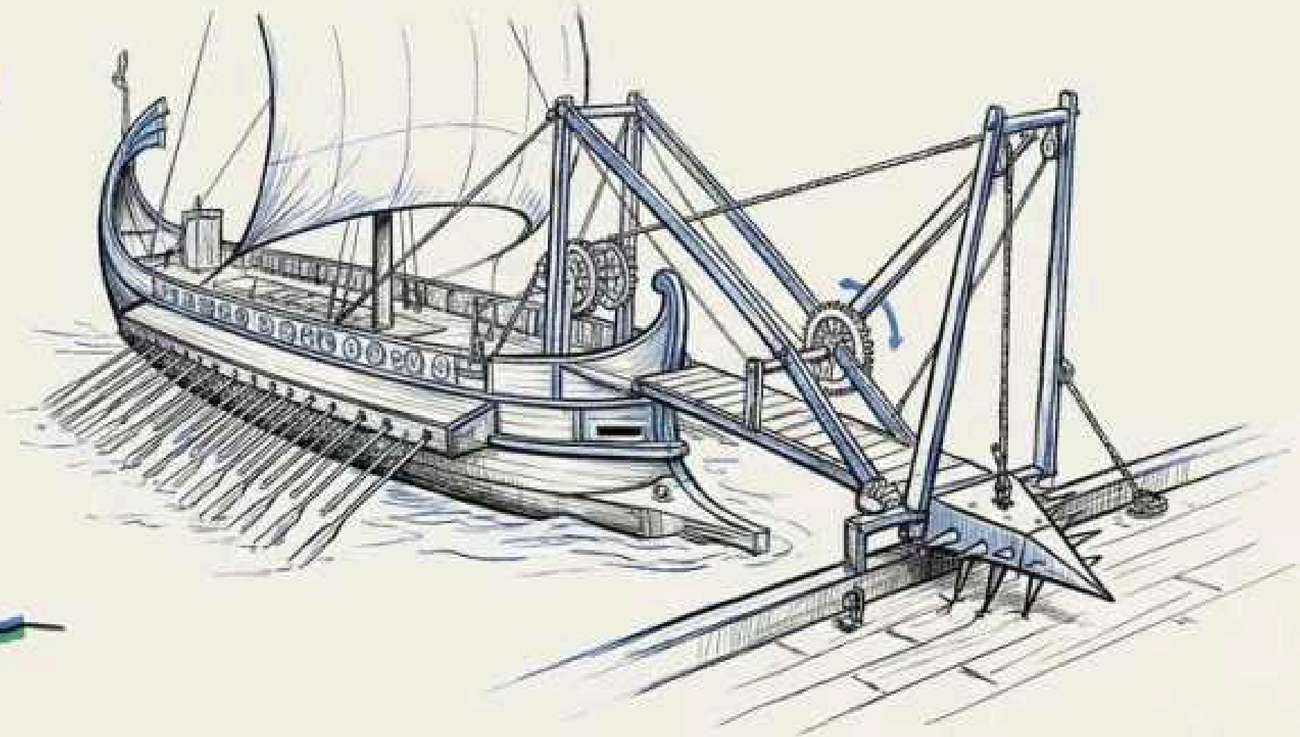
Practical strengths and logistics mattered just as much as courage.

Clash with Carthage (264–241 BCE)

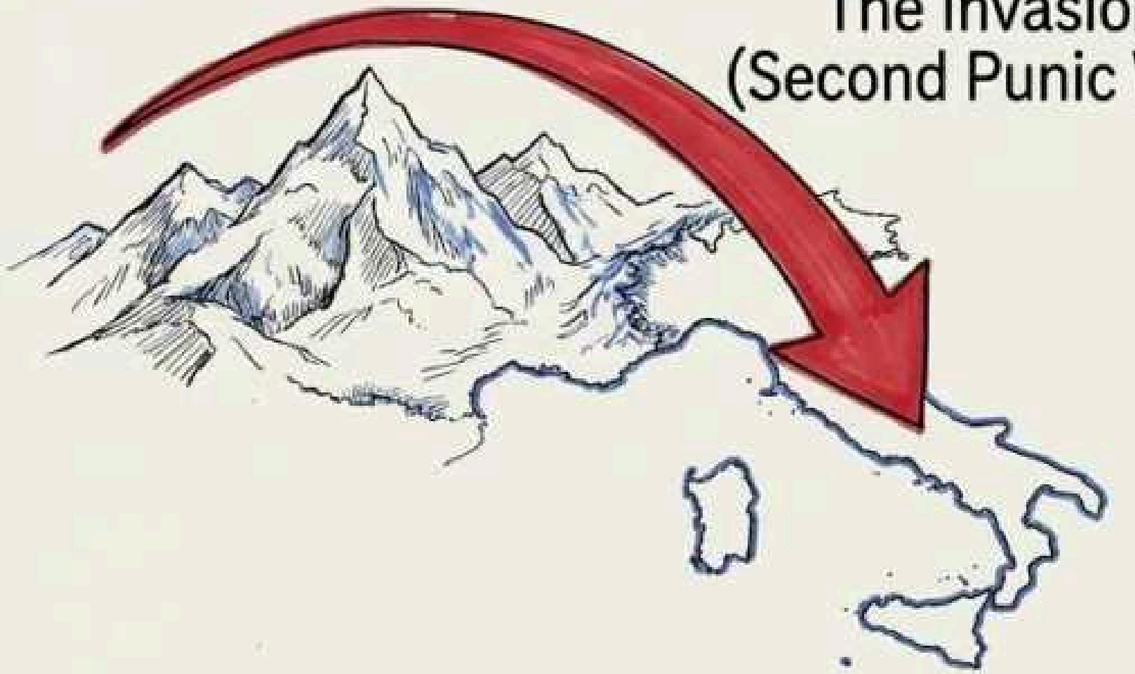
The Rival: Carthage.
Founded by Phoenicians (Punic).
Massive, strong navy.

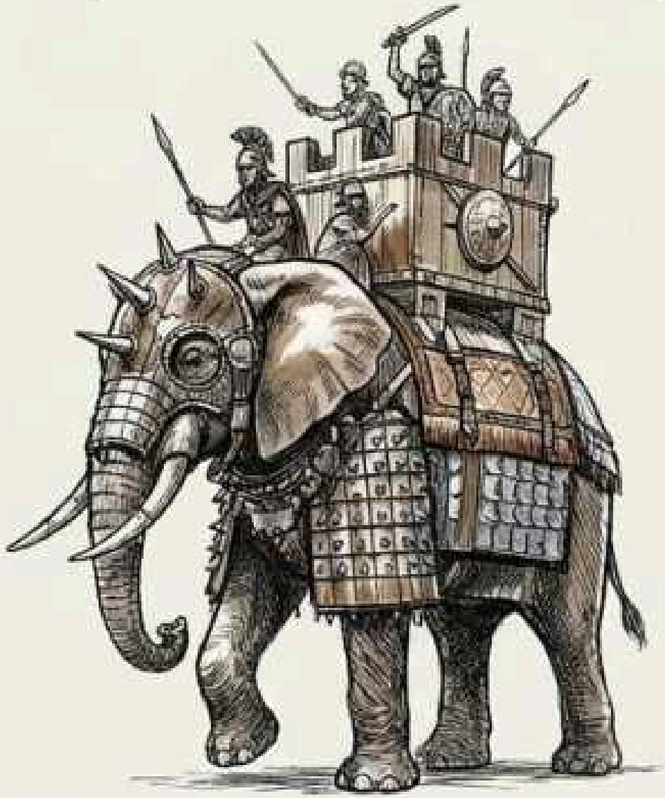


- **The First Punic War:** Fought primarily over control of Sicily.
- **The Result:** Rome adapts by building a massive fleet, wins the war, and claims Sicily as its very first province.



Hannibal at the Gates (218–201 BCE)





- **The March:** Carthaginian general Hannibal marches an army with elephants over the Alps.
- **The Disasters:** Rome suffers crushing defeats at Lake Trasimene and Cannae (216 BCE), where tens of thousands died.
- **The Resilience:** Despite catastrophic losses, Rome outright refuses to make peace, and most Italian allies stay loyal.

Victory and Total Destruction

¶ 4.12

Phase 1: 202 BCE (Zama)

Rome wears Hannibal down and moves the war to Africa.

- Scipio (later "Africanus") defeats Hannibal at Zama.



Result: Carthage loses its fleet, its empire, and pays a massive indemnity.

Phase 2: 149–146 BCE (Third Punic War)

A generation later, Rome returns to finish the job.



Result: The literal and total destruction of the city of Carthage itself.

The Price of Provinces

¶ 4.13

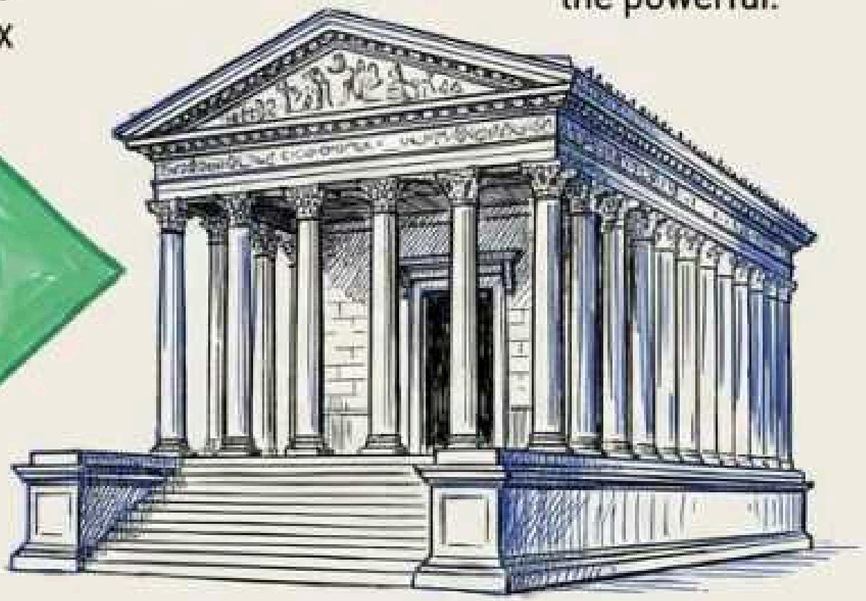
The Empire
(Acquired by 133 BCE)

- Sicily
- Sardinia & Corsica
- Spain (two)
- Macedonia
- Africa
- Asia

- **Administration:** Governed by Roman magistrates on 1-2 year terms.
- **Taxation:** Managed by *publicani* (private companies of tax collectors).

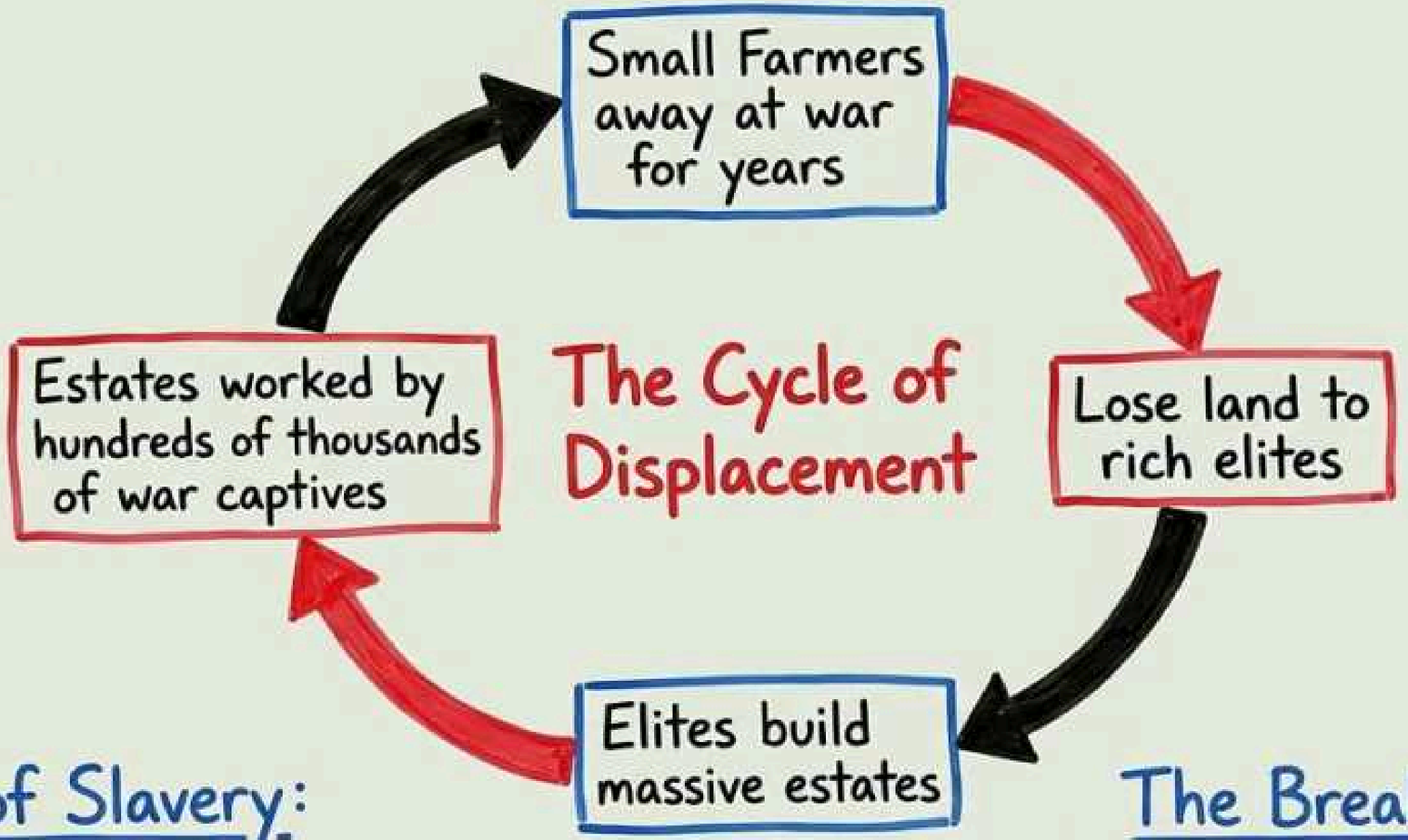


The Consequence: Unprecedented wealth flows into Rome. Governors rapidly enrich themselves, leading to rampant extortion trials that are routinely rigged in favor of the powerful.



Slavery and Inequality

¶ 4.14



Explosion of Slavery:

Captives forced into labor on big estates, in mines, as household servants/teachers, and as gladiators.

The Breaking Point:

Massive slave revolts break out, the first in Sicily (135–132 BCE).

State Religion & Syncretism

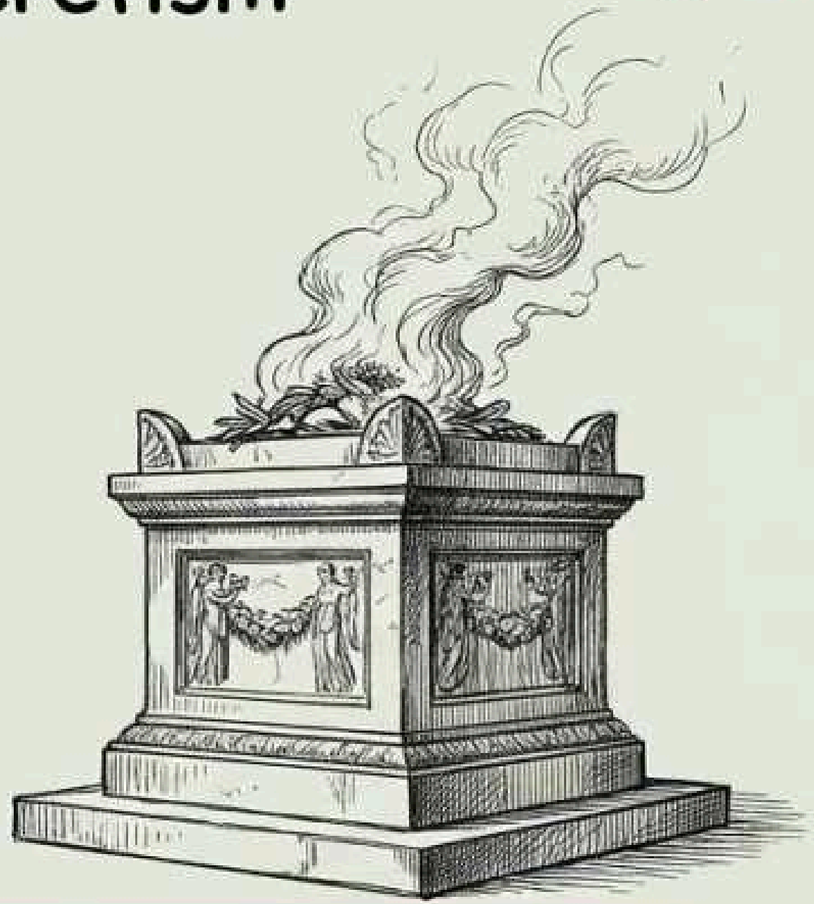
¶ 4.15

Core Concept: Religion is viewed as a strict public duty—honoring gods (Jupiter, Juno, Mars) through perfectly correct rituals.

Syncretism

Roman Gods ≈ Greek Gods

Rome readily absorbed foreign cults.



State Control (The Limit):

Rome accepted outsiders but violently suspected secretive groups. (e.g., In 186 BCE, the Senate actively suppressed the Bacchanalia).

Family Structure & Education

¶ 4.16

Paterfamilias

The oldest male, holding ultimate legal authority over his household, including sons and enslaved people.

Matrons:

Though legally required to have a guardian, Roman women could own property and wielded immense real influence at home (and sometimes behind the scenes in politics).

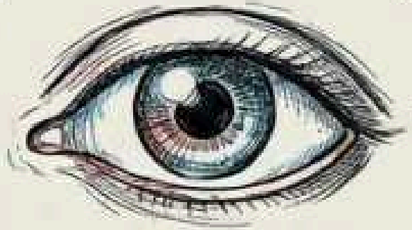
Education:

Elite boys were trained bilingually (Latin and, increasingly, Greek), with oratory positioned as the central, indispensable skill.

Mos Maiorum (Custom of the Ancestors) ¶ 4.17

Virtus
(Courage / Martial Valor)

Pietas
(Duty to gods and family)



Fides
(Good faith / Reliability)

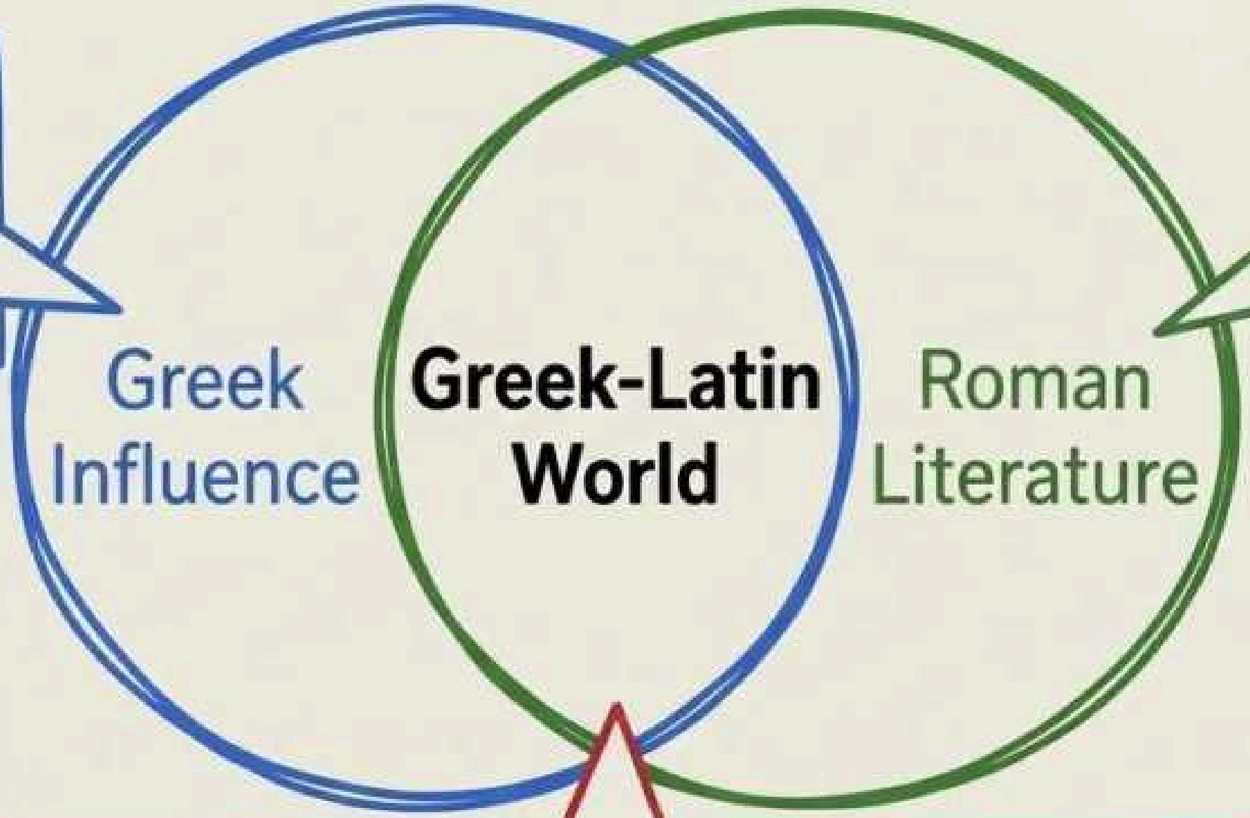
Gravitas
(Seriousness / Weight of character)

The Standard: Romans always looked backward. The mos maiorum (custom of the ancestors) was the ultimate standard of behavior.

The Hellenization of Roman Culture

¶ 4.18

Translation:
Livius Andronicus translates the Odyssey into Latin (~240 BCE).



Adaptation:
Comedies of Plautus and the poems of Ennius follow.

Historical Analysis: Polybius, taken to Rome as a Greek hostage, ends up writing the definitive history asking how Rome rose so incredibly fast.

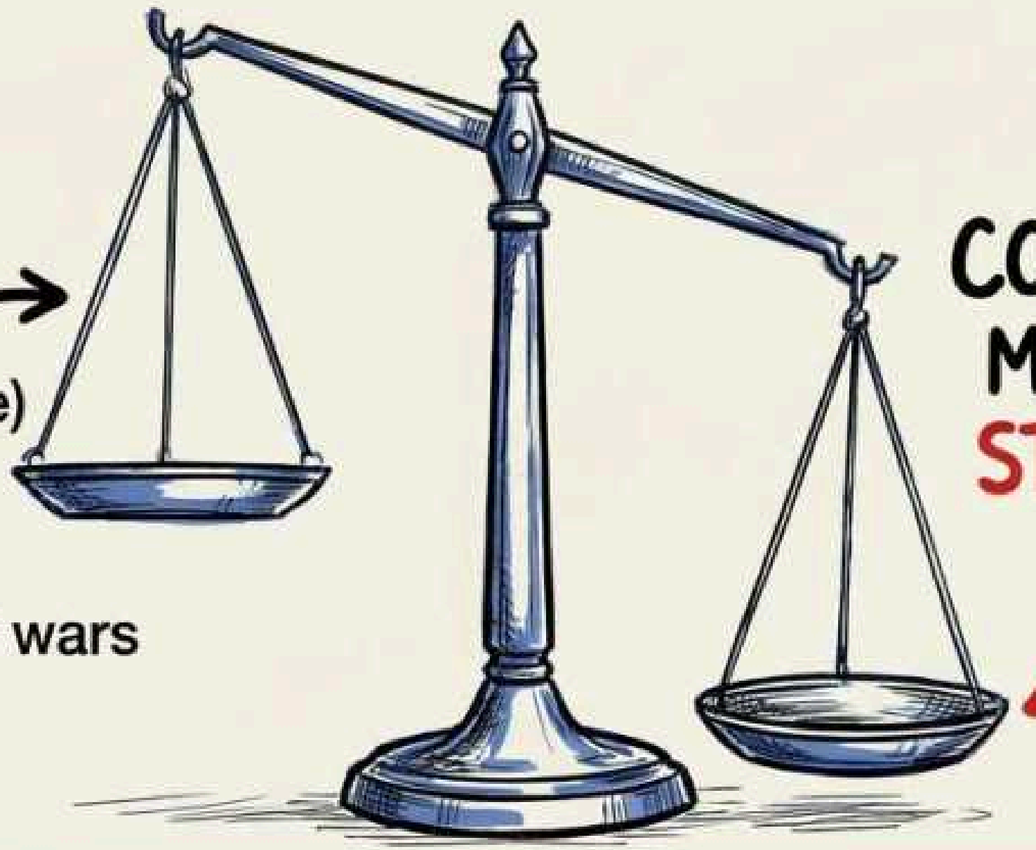
Result: The Mediterranean is now a unified Greek-Latin cultural sphere.

Summary: The Republic Under Strain

¶ 4.19

The Rise

- Replaced kings with a Republic
- Balanced power (Consuls/Senate/People)
- Secured Italy via alliances/citizen army
- Defeated Carthage in 3 wars
- Took provinces across the Mediterranean



The Risk

CONQUEST BROUGHT MASSIVE SLAVERY, STARK INEQUALITY, AND AMBITIOUS GENERALS.

The Preview: These immense structural strains are about to break the Republic entirely.

Testing the Theories of Success

¶ 4.20

Competing Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1 (Polybius): The Mixed Constitution explains the success.

Hypothesis 2 (Lecture Focus): The Citizen Army + Italian Alliances + Strategic Luck.



Discussion Prompts for the Audience:

1. Which of these factors do you find most convincing?
2. What specific historical evidence would you look for to test it?
3. Historiography: Why might ancient writers tend to credit institutions and moral character over logistics and luck?