

# A Crash Course in Roman Culture (the Basics)

by

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I made this easy to read summary from all the cultural units in [Ecce Romani I](#). It is a quick reference both for you and your students. I give the students a copy. When we have quizzes on cultural items, I can refer them to both their textbook and the note packet. Students like the fact that the information is presented in a concise manner. The students are then able to concentrate on learning the important terms and facts. For many, even though the terms are in bold in the book, a summary outside of the text is helpful. It's like having a set of Cliff Notes. I especially like to use this as a part of my final exam study guides.

~ A CRASH COURSE IN ROMAN CULTURE (the Basics) ~  
Ecce Romani I

**People:** Romans

**Country:** Italy (controlled most of Western Europe, England, northern Africa and Asia Minor at height of Empire in early 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.)

**Geography:** Rome is situated on the **Tiber River**. **Ostia** was the port town of Rome on the coast. The **Apennines** run down the spine of Italy. Rome was originally built on 7 hills. First on the Palatine Hill, and then the city spread over the **Esquiline**, **Aventine**, **Quirinal**, **Capitoline**, **Viminal**, and **Caelian**.

**Language:** Latin (basis for other Romance languages: Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian. "Romance" refers to the Romans, not love.)

**Particular to our book:** eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79 A.D.; story takes place in 80 A.D. Mt. Vesuvius destroyed Pompeii and Herculaneum on the Bay of Naples south of Rome. The family starts out in Baiae and travels north to Rome on the Appian Way.

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**City Itself (buildings and functions):**

**aqueducts:** brought water into the city

**Circus Maximus:** chariot races (**curriculum:** the race track;

**quadrigae:** the chariots; **factiones:** 4 chariot teams of red, blue, green, and white); **spina:** center barrier of track; **metae:** turning posts; 7 laps or about 5 miles, each lap marked by a dolphin)

**Colosseum:** gladiatorial fights (aka, "Flavian Amphitheater")

**Forum:** city center which contained the **Curia** (senate house), **basilica** (law court), **Rostra** (speaking platform), **Tabularium** (records hall) and temples

**Via Sacra:** "Sacred Road" that led into the Forum.

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**Dress:**

**bullae:** good luck charm worn by children until marriage (girls) or coming of age (boys) (some sources say girls didn't wear bullae)

**palla:** shawl to cover body and head worn by women

**soleae:** sandals

**stola:** floor-length "dress" without sleeves for women

**toga virilis:** plain white toga worn by most adult males

**toga praetexta:** toga with a purple border- worn by members of high government such as senators and young boys under 15 years. Some also say girls wore the toga praetexta prior to marriage.

**tunica:** simple white tunic worn by men and women

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#### Family:

-immediate family consisted of the **pater** (father), **mater** (mother) and **liberi** (children) (**frater**- brother; **soror**- sister)

**manus:** the transfer of **patria potestas** from the father to his son-in-law

**Patria potestas:** supreme power of Roman father over family and his slaves. As **dominus** (master), he could sell or kill slaves, had control of all property in the family, and also had control over his grandchildren. The father also had the power to kill his children (with the consent of a council of male relatives. This power was VERY rarely exercised.)

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#### Founding of Rome and Its History

Romans traced their lineage back to Aeneas, the Trojan hero (see Trojan War section). Since Aeneas was also the son of Anchises and the goddess, Venus, the Romans could claim direct lineage to the gods.

**Lavinia:** Aeneas' wife in Italy. She was from **Latium**.

**Lavinium:** city founded by Aeneas and Lavinia

**Ascanius**, Aeneas' son, eventually founded **Alba Longa**. The twins, **Romulus** and **Remus**, were from Alba Longa.

**Romulus and Remus:** twin sons of Rhea Silvia and Mars.

The twins were left to die by their uncle, **Amulius**, who had stolen power from his brother, **Numitor** (father of Rhea Silvia). A she-wolf nursed the twins after finding them. **Faustulus**, a shepherd, then found them and raised them. When they grew up, the twins killed Amulius and took control of **Alba Longa**. They then founded a new city. Romulus killed Remus and thus founded "Roma" on the top of the Palatine Hill. Rome was founded supposedly on April 21, 753 B.C., according the historian, Livy.

### **Monarchy (753-509 B.C.) Rule of the 7 kings**

1<sup>st</sup>: **Romulus**. He had a shortage of women in his new city so he invited the **Sabines**, a local tribe to a festival. At the festival, the Romans kidnapped the Sabine women and forced them to be their brides. Legend has it that when the Sabine men attacked the Romans, the women stopped the battle because they didn't want to become both widows and orphans on the same day. The two peoples thus united as one.

2<sup>nd</sup>: **Numa Pompilius**: devoted much attention to law and religion

3<sup>rd</sup>: **Tullus Hostilius**: attacked Alba Longa. Conflict settled by the fight between the **Horatii** (Roman) triplets and the **Curiatii** (Alban) triplets. The Horatii won.

4<sup>th</sup>: **Ancus Marcus**: built Ostia, the seaport of Rome, and completed other construction projects

5<sup>th</sup>: **Lucius Tarquinius Priscus**: got throne by fraud and was assassinated. Wife, Tanaquil, helped son-in-law, Servius Tullius, rise to power.

6<sup>th</sup>: **Servius Tullius**: established first census and established classes of Roman society. Killed by his daughter, Tullia, and her husband, **Tarquinius Superbus**

7<sup>th</sup>: **Tarquinius Superbus (the Proud)**: executed many. His son, **Sextus Tarquinius**, raped **Lucretia**, and Tarquinius Superbus was ousted from the throne. This led to the overthrow of the monarchy and installation of the Republic.

### **Republic (509-31 B.C.)**

**Brutus and Collatinus** were the first consuls. There was no longer rule by one.

First Punic War against Carthage: 264-241 B.C.

Second Punic War: 218-201 B.C. (Hannibal defeated by Scipio Africanus)

Third Punic War: 149-146 B.C. (Carthage razed)

Events and people from 146-63 B.C.: **Gracchi**, **Marius** and **Sulla**, **Pompey the Great**

Collapse of the Republic from 63-31 B.C.- **Cicero** (orator), **Julius Caesar**, **Marc Antony** and **Cleopatra**, **Battle of Actium**, **Octavian (Augustus)**

**Government within the Republic:**

**aedile:** commerce and public works

**consul:** 2 each year, head of the civil government and army

**censor:** census and senate membership. Elected for 5 years.

**Pontifex Maximus:** high priest of Rome

**praetor:** directed judicial system

**quaestor:** financial matters

**tribunes:** championed lower classes

**cursus honorum:** series of political offices in a political career in the order of: quaestor, appointment to Senate, praetor, consul, censor

**Society during Republic:** basic classes were the **plebs** (lower), the **equestrians** (wealthy, non-senators in upper class, and the **patricians** (senatorial aristocracy, upper class)

**Empire (31BC-A.D. 476)**

Rule by emperors. **Augustus** (Octavian) was the first.

**Julio-Claudian** emperors (27 B.C.-A.D. 96): Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero

**Flavians (A.D. 96-138):** Vespasian, Titus, Domitian

**Good Emperors (A.D. 138-180):** Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius

\*\*\*\*\*Julius Caesar was never an emperor. He was killed in 44 B.C. during the Republic.

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**Housing:****Types:**

**domus:** self-contained house in the city

**insula:** apartment building

**villa maritima:** seaside villa

**villa rustica:** country house and farm which included housing for the family, livestock/slaves, and storehouses.

**villa urbana:** large country villa of the very wealthy. The farming areas were separate from the living areas, unlike a **villa rustica**.

**Parts of a house:**

<b>atrium:</b> front part of the house	<b>peristylum:</b> garden area
<b>culina:</b> kitchen	<b>hortus:</b> garden itself
<b>cubiculum:</b> bedroom	<b>triclinium:</b> dining room
<b>compluvium:</b> opening in roof to admit rain water	
<b>impluvium:</b> basin in floor beneath the <b>compluvium</b> to collect rain water	

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**Names:**

**praenomen:** first name

**nomen:** name of family clan

**cognomen:** name which distinguished the particular branch of a family clan.

Gaius (praenomen) Julius (nomen) Caesar (cognomen)

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**Religion:**

The Romans were polytheistic (worshipped many gods). The main 12 were the **Olympians**. They were: (Roman/Greek)

**Apollo/Apollo:** god of archery, medicine, music, light, and oracles. Twin of Diana.

**Ceres/Demeter:** goddess of agriculture and harvest. Daughter, **Proserpina/Persephone**, kidnapped by **Pluto/Hades** and made queen of the underworld. 6 months on earth/6 months in underworld- myth explains the seasons.

**Diana/Artemis:** twin of Apollo. Goddess of moon and hunting

**Jupiter/Zeus:** king of the gods. Symbol: thunderbolt

**Juno/Hera:** queen of the gods. Sister/wife of Jupiter. Goddess of marriage and women.

**Mars/Ares:** god of war. Father of Romulus and Remus, founders of Rome.

**Minerva/Athena:** goddess of wisdom, weaving, creator of the olive tree. Symbol: owl

**Mercury/Hermes:** messenger god, god of thieves and travelers, led souls to the underworld. Symbol: caduceus (wand with 2 snakes), winged helmet/sandals.

**Neptune/Poseidon:** god of the waters and sea. Created the horse.

Symbol: trident

**Venus:** goddess of love and beauty. Mother of Aeneas and Cupid.

**Vesta/Hestia:** goddess of the hearth and home. Symbol: eternal flame

**Vulcan/Hephaestus:** blacksmith god. Lame and ugly god. Forged thunderbolts for Jupiter. Husband of Venus.

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### Slavery:

Slavery was an important part of Roman culture. Slaves served in and outside of the household, worked on farms, built buildings, served as tutors, were trained as gladiators, etc.

**FUG:** short for *fugitivus*. Branded on the head of an escaped slave who was caught.

**libertus:** a freed slave

**manumission:** freeing of a slave

**villicus:** slave/farm manager

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### Time:

A day was sunrise to sunset. The "first hour" was at sunrise

**vigiliae:** the 12-hours night was broken into 4 **vigiliae** (watches)

**Horae:** goddesses who regulated the seasons, passage of time & weather changes. They were daughters of Jupiter.

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### Trojan War:

**Aeneas:** Trojan hero who escaped from Troy after the Greeks conquered the city using the Trojan horse. This ended the Trojan War.

**Agamemnon:** king of Mycenae, leader of the Greeks who went to Troy. He sacrificed his daughter, Iphigenia, in order to sail to Troy.

**Creusa:** wife of Aeneas in Troy. She does not escape.

**Anchises:** father of Aeneas

**Ascanius (Iulus):** son of Aeneas and Creusa

**Dido:** queen of Carthage (in modern Tunisia). She and Aeneas have a love affair (after Creusa is dead).

**Helen of Troy/Sparta:** the "face that launched a 1000 ships."

Kidnapped by Paris from Sparta and taken to Troy- cause of the war

**Lavinia:** wife of Aeneas in Italy

**Paris:** kidnapped **Helen of Sparta**, wife of **Menelaus**, causing the Trojan War

**Priam and Hecuba:** king and queen of Troy. Parents of the great hero, **Hector**, and of Paris

**Ulysses (Odysseus):** came up with the idea to build the Trojan Horse.

#### Literature of the Trojan War:

**Aeneid:** epic poem written by **Vergil** in Latin. Glorifies the founding of Rome and the hero, Aeneas, and his journey from Troy to Italy.

**Iliad:** written by **Homer** in Greek. Story about the Greek hero, Achilles, in the last year of the Trojan War.

**Odyssey:** written by **Homer** in Greek. Story about the Greek hero, Odysseus/Ulysses, and his journey back to his kingdom of Ithaca.

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