

The Romans in the Sixth Grade

by

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Rome was not founded in a single day. Yet the Romans themselves appeared in history distinctively on the scene with their first contributions.

Romulus ploughed the borders for what would be “the eternal city.” He set the plow in the earth, drove the horses forward and lifted the plow where there would be a gate crying aloud, “Porta.” In origin, Rome was the effort of a single human being—the boundaries and restriction an area created by an act of will—this is my area, the manifestation of power: the emergence of “I will!”

Conflicts arose with everyone outside of the defined area, beyond the walls. The first conflict was with his brother, Remus. Twin sons of the war-god Mars who had visited the vestal virgin, Rhea Sylvia, in the temple—the holy Vesta-temple of families and homes—they were thrown into the Tiber River to drown with their mother. But Mars guided them safely to a cave in the cliffs where they were nourished by a female wolf.

When the brothers were grown, Romulus was chosen by the gods to be the ruler over the new city. Twelve mighty birds of prey flew over their heads, and first six birds swerved above Remus. A disagreement arose as to how to judge the event, but Romulus was convinced he should build walls where he had plowed. Remus made fun of his brother and jumped over the wall. Romulus killed him and declared, “This will happen to anyone who jumps over my walls!”

Romulus invited everyone to live in his city. Assylants, criminals, homeless and other people streamed in. The city grew but there were no women, so the Romans invited their neighbors to a great festival—with the purpose of stealing their women. Thus Rome was created: with the visit of Mars, with the death of the mother, through the milk of a she-wolf, by fratricide, and by stealing women. These were acts of will by the founders of the city.

Rome’s walls were strong, and the Romans were men of action who stood on strong legs. Harm to those who came too close. Their self-esteem grew with their consciousness of personal power and strength. “Not you, but I” was the Roman attitude.

A true Roman had respect for himself and his actions. His personal qualities were fully developed. In his inner life he felt power, fortitude, endurance, fearlessness, trustworthiness, and a whole gallery of other personal qualities that were the source of power in his soul. Soul forces were inspirations from godly beings to which he called.

He had personal possessions as well, but he was convinced they also came from the gods. The Roman's relationship to his gods was to invoke them to lower themselves to his personal earthly level, to give him strength, not merely in cloudy generalizations but to participate at certain times for certain purposes.

On one occasion when Romulus realized that he could possibly be trapped by an enemy's invasion, he asked Jupiter to give him the strength to carry on. He received the power and named the origin of that source, Jupiter Stator. A temple was named for that god. It was not Jupiter in his usual figure as the almighty god, but a very special side of Jupiter that could send human beings power for independence, to stand erect and unbeatable on the earth. No one could best a Roman so inspired by the power of Jupiter Stator; the power of the god had become a personal quality. In this way Romans related to their gods. They believed that these qualities could not appear on their own, but were the work of gods gifted to man and made private property.

The Romans called upon the god Mars before and after war. This was not the general celebration of a war god, but rather an invocation to be filled with special power in order to go invincibly into war. The Romans felt this power came from Mars Gradivus, from Mars that storms into battle. This quality to Roman soldiers proclaimed with the words: "Attack, to victory or death!"

For the Romans, every thing, every action or activity, had a certain god. They saw special godliness in all natural phenomena. The entire world of gods was specified—earth, water, air, spring, forest, flood, cliff, and so forth, all had their assigned protective and inspiring gods. The same was true of the state, the tribe, the family and the individuals. Every human being had his "genius" that appeared just for him. Every house had its own gods, lares, that protected them as long as the family survived. Every action was connected to gods: when the farmer ploughed he called a certain god; another god was called when he sowed; and others when he harvested, thrashed or harrowed. The Romans even related every stage in the life of a plant to a specific god: one for the seed, the sprout, the leaf, the stem, the bud, and so forth. Colorless and pictureless, the gods appeared in special activities on the sensory experienced earth and in the Roman's soul life as characteristic qualities. Romans had strong feelings of dependencies on the help and inspiration from the gods. One had to behave in such a way that the gods would appear, and one had to create the basis upon which the god could

manifest itself. Ceremonies for the act of calling the gods became more and more specialized. They became almost pacts. Any change in the ceremony would affect the god's ability to participate in the action.

In this way the Romans not only separated himself from his fellow man but also from the world of the gods. There was also a specified godly origin within this separation: the god Terminus, the god of borders, the purely earthly as well as the purely human borders. Harm to those who messed with the border signs! Harm to those who entered private property and personal rights! Terminus gave the Romans the power to say: "Not you, but I! Here I am the man of this house."

The Romans developed strong self-esteem and powerful egotism. That independence was carefully regulated in relationships with each other. The Romans had to follow their laws, the twelve tables of laws. They wrote down the correct and necessary behavior for a citizen, a slave and the state. All relationships were defined and determined, woven into certain obligations. Their affairs were so detailed that a misguided formality could change an agreed-upon contract. For example, when one entered an obligatio, one was asked: "Do you promise?" If he answered, "Promitto," the contract was not binding, because the only valid answer by law was, "Spondeo," which actually meant the same. Precision was demanded in every detail.

In Roman history we find many individuals who exemplify characteristic Roman qualities. Horatius Codes single-handedly stopped the enemy's access to the bridgehead until the bridge was destroyed. He then called to the god of the river and received the power to swim across the river in full armor. Mucius Scaevola let his right hand burn to coal without making a grimace. The Roman Consul Fabricius did not allow himself to be seduced by Pyrrhos's gold or scare his elephant. Nor did he allow himself to be tricked into using Pyrrhos's doctor, when he offered to give the king poison for money. The letter was sent to Pyrrhos, for he shall be conquered in open battle. When the Romans heard about Alexander the Great, they wanted him to come to Rome so they could improve their reputation by defeating that great conqueror.

When Rome was endangered and was forced to find a dictator, they sent for Quinctius Cincinnatus. He was plowing his field when the messenger arrived and told him of the Senate's choice of him as dictator. He dried the sweat off his eyebrow, asked his wife for a clean toga, placed himself as dictator of the Roman army, defeated his enemy and after sixteen days returned home to his land and continued plowing.

Not only particular individuals embodied the archetypical Roman characteristics but almost everyone did. When one died another appeared from the masses and proved himself a great leader. As Brennus brought his Gauls into the city they found eighty senators sitting on their chairs at the Forum. They

looked so honorable, so majestic in that circle that the Gauls could not tell if they were human beings or statues. Only by pulling the beard of one of them and receiving a hit with an ivory stick were the Gauls sure that the senators were alive, - then they cut them all down. When King Pyrrhos asked his messenger what he thought of the Romans he replied: "They are all kings!" They all had the majestic posture and dignity in their movements. The worse humiliation a Roman could imagine was to bow one's neck under the yoke of servitude for they had to physically bend over, a posture which was totally self-demeaning.

In olden times the royal attitude among the Romans inspired them to act only for the best for the state. They considered themselves as functions in the life of the state. They had a strong self-consciousness but were always subjects of Rome. No single person would steal the highest power for his personal best. They transformed royalty into a form of government with a consulate whose power was shared according to who was voted in.

Roman egotism was a strength because they held it within certain creative limitations. The Romans developed generalized morality or limited egotism. In later periods Cicero cried out in desperation: "*O Tempora, o mores!* What has become of the old Romans?" Egoism no longer functioned as a positive characteristic in a larger context. Individuals began to act from their own desires and their entire character was placed in the service of their own good, for their egotistical self. In the emperor years that followed, Roman strength became unlimited egotism, the god Terminus was offended, and moral decline set in. It is enough to remember the Roman emperors. The time had come when human beings needed a new reality as a higher power. The time was gone when humanity could legitimately view the state as most the important power.

We teach Roman history in the sixth grade at the Waldorf school. The children have reached an age when inner skepticism appears. They no longer feel fulfilled with the pictures from fairy tales and the mythology of their fifth grade studies, when they experienced the richness of Greek mythology with its independent gods. With their budding skepticism the children begin to disconnect from their surroundings and clarify their own positions. They make themselves known as "sprouting" personalities. Like the Romans they acquire personality characteristics and become more and more "private people." Their senses awaken more fully and their own observations engage them in new ways.

Now they want to grasp the world from their own starting point. In order to meet these needs among children and to find work in which they can try out these new characteristics, we bring them Roman history. It can appeal to their growing personality. We bring physics whereby they can sharpen their capacity for observation and awaken to new sensory experiences. We bring woodworking

in which activity they can use their own forces to master the hard, earthly materials.

At the same time we as teachers should keep in mind what happened to the Roman Empire when it transformed from limited, moral egoism into unlimited, immoral egoism, for they did not succeed in establishing peace in the world. We try to teach a healthy perspective of the world where human beings belong to a larger unity which allows for both an independent outer entity like the Greek gods and also the Roman-like inner source of will in each human being.