

CHAPTER
5
SECTION 1

Section Summary

THE ROMAN WORLD TAKES SHAPE

Rome's location on the Italian peninsula, centrally located in the Mediterranean Sea, benefited the Romans as they expanded. In addition, Italy had wide, fertile plains, which supported a growing population. Rome began on seven hills near the Tiber River.

Romans shared the Italian peninsula with Greek colonists and the **Etruscans**—a people who ruled most of central Italy for a time. The Romans learned from the Etruscans, studying their engineering techniques and adapting their alphabet.

In 509 B.C., the Romans drove out the Etruscans and founded the state of Rome. They put in place a new form of government called a **republic**. To keep any individual from obtaining too much power, the republic was run by officials who represented the people. The most powerful governing body was the senate. Its 300 members were all **patricians**, or members of the landholding upper class. Each year, the senators nominated two **consuls** from the patrician class to supervise the administration and command the armies. Also, in the event of war, the senate might choose a temporary **dictator**, or ruler with complete control over the government.

Initially, all government officials were patricians. **Plebeians**, or common people, had little influence. However, the plebeians fought for the right to elect their own officials, called **tribunes**. The tribunes could **veto**, or block, laws that they felt harmed the plebeians. Although the senate still dominated the government, the plebeians had gained access to power and their rights were protected.

The family was the basic unit of Roman society. Although women could own property and, in later Roman times, run businesses, men had absolute power over the family. Romans also believed in education for all children. Religion, too, was a significant part of Roman society.

By 270 B.C., Rome controlled most of the Italian peninsula. This was due mainly to a well-trained army. The basic military unit was the **legion**. Each legion included about 5,000 citizen-soldiers. As Rome occupied new territories, they treated their defeated enemies well. As long as conquered peoples accepted Roman rule and obeyed certain laws, the Romans allowed them to maintain their own customs and governments.

Review Questions

1. What governing body in the republic had the greatest power?

2. What were the consuls' responsibilities?

READING CHECK

What were the two main social classes in the Roman republic?

VOCABULARY STRATEGY

What does the word *dominated* mean in the underlined sentence? The word *dominate* originates from the Latin word *dominus* which means "master." Use this word-origins clue to help you figure out the meaning of *dominated*.

READING SKILL

Identify Causes and Effects

What was the cause and what was the effect of the establishment of the office of tribune?
