

19. ROME: FROM THE KINGDOM TO THE EMPIRE

In antiquity, Rome was ruled by seven Kings, characters participating in both mythical and historical reality. In fact, they are comparable in many ways to the seven Manus of the past, since each one of them brought a different legislation to the state. These rulers are reminiscent of the seven *ṛṣi* and the seven planets for the different sciences that were developed during their reigns. The last King, Tarquinius Superbus, has gone down in history for his cruelty and tyranny.



1. Tarquinius Superbus coin

For this reason, the Senate and the Roman people rebelled against him, banishing him from the city. The State was then radically transformed in a Republic. The title of *Rex* (King) remained just as the supreme priestly charge, but deprived of any temporal power. In place of the King, two Consuls were elected; one proceeding from the patrician caste and the second of plebeian origin, so that they could control each other, and avoid the danger of another tyranny. Moreover, the Consular mandate had a duration of one year only. This regime change received the approval from the very Oracle of Delphi. As it can be seen, the religion of the Romans, which was of Pythagorean origin, was very similar to that of the Greeks. The two religions had shrines in common and recognized each other; the Greeks didn't regard the Romans to be barbarians nor the Romans considered the Greeks as barbarians.



2. Roman Knight (*Eques Romanus*)

Gradually the patriciate had to surrender more administrative powers to the plebeians, especially to the class of warriors (knights, Lat. *Equites*, Sskr. *ksatriya*), but they retained full control of the Senate and of the priestly functions. However, with the closure of the King's temporal power, the depowering of the sacred offices represented a loss of power for the patriciate. This loss of power was, on the other hand, compensated with the strengthening of the patrician presence in the army, which became the backbone of the Roman Republic. In fact, the elite cavalry cohort was formed by young patricians, while the rest of the cavalry was the expression of the knights. The infantry, on the other hand, was composed by free men. The Roman army was well organized, well trained and disciplined; the art and

science of strategy and tactics reached such high points that no army in Europe, Africa and Western Asia could match it.



3. Roman infantry

In Rome, Religion was clearly divided into exoterism and esoterism. Exoterism corresponded to familiar or public rituals, often represented by sacrifices connected to cosmic events or celebrations for the Republic. Esotericism was not hidden by fear of persecution or restrictions by public cults, as happens in the religions of Semitic origin. Simply, the different *sādhanās*, just as in Greece, had the form of the Mysteries and therefore a certain reserve was maintained, so that the rituals were not deconsecrated by the presence of profane or curious people. Patricians who wished to receive the *dīkṣā* had at their disposal the Pythagorean Mysteries, of which we have already spoken on this Website¹. The matrons, that is to say the patrician Ladies, received the initiation to the Mysteries of *Bona Dea* (Good Goddess), of very ancient Latin origin.



4. *Bona Dea*

Instead for the plebeians there were initiations (also of Pythagorean origin) characterized by their activities and occupations. The knightly (chivalric) initiation had a military structure. The general (*dux*, En. duke), who also performed the sacred function of master (*guru*), had the title of Emperor (*Imperator*). Under him the *upagurus* were called princes (*principes*), the most advanced *upāsakas* had the title of Comrades of the Emperor (*Comites Imperatoris* Engl. Counts of the Emperor) and the neophyte initiates were known as "trainees" (*tirones*).

The infantry was religiously organized in fellowships (*sodalicia*). Each of them had its initiatic organization under the guidance of priests of minor ranks. Likewise, the merchants, the artists and the peasants were grouped into similar brotherhoods (*sodalicia*), within which a professional initiation could be obtained. Instead, the artisans were organized in colleges (*collegia*), whose organization was very similar to the Indian *śreṇis*. At the head of a *collegium* there was a master of arts (*magister atrium*, Sskr. *śilpācārya*, *sthapatī*) or prince (*princeps*). The advanced disciples were called companions (*sodales*, Sskr. *karmasārathi*, *taṣṣaka*) and the apprentices *tirones* (Sskr. *upaśikṣa*, *vardhakī*). The religion of the Romans, however, was very open to the religions of other peoples, especially towards the Greek Mysteries. Many young Romans of the upper classes used to travel to Greece to receive the

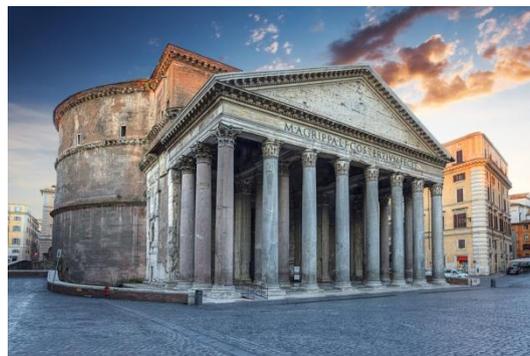
¹ See Ch. N° 12.

initiation of the Eleusinian, Orphic, Kabirian or Dionysian Mysteries². This increased when Rome, in its territorial expansion, conquered Greece in 230 BC. As Rome was conquering new territories, the religions of vanquished peoples were progressively integrated into the Roman *Pantheon*. Thus it happened that in Rome, capital of the Empire, were transferred the branches of the Isiac Mysteries proceeding from Egypt, the Mithraic Mysteries from Persia, the Chaldean Mysteries from the southern Mesopotamia, the Mysteries of Cybele (Lat. *Magna Mater*), from Phrygia, those of Baal from Syria etc. In the first century BC in Rome and in the main cities of the Empire there were even communities of *Hindū Brāhmaṇas* and Buddhist *Śramaṇas*. In Rome temples were built for all the religions that had come into contact with the Empire.



5. Extent of Roman Empire

In Rome and in all the other cities of the Empire there were also Jewish communities. However, the typical exclusivism of the Semitic Religions³ claiming that their God is the only true one always obstructed the integration of their cult into the Roman Pantheon⁴.



6. Rome, the Pantheon Temple

The Romans could not put up with the Jews who considered themselves to be the "God's chosen people" and regarded their religion as the only true. Rome adopted a particularly strict policy to control the Judaic question. In 70 AD the Romans ravaged their vassal Judean Kingdom, destroyed the Jehovah's Temple of Jerusalem and dispersed the Jews deporting them in all the provinces of their vast empire. Similarly Celtic deities and Druidic initiation nor the religion of Carthage were accepted in Rome, reason being that Celtic populations (the Gauls, Lat. *Galli*, as the Romans called them) and the Carthaginians were the only enemies that posed a serious threat to the survival of Rome⁵. Carthage, which was located on the northern coast of Africa, after three bloody wars, was eventually defeated by

² See Ch. N° 11.

³ The Jewish, Christian and Muslim monotheistic Religions are all of Semitic origin.

⁴ "All the Gods". Name of a still existing temple in Rome, where the *murtis* of all the Gods worshiped in the Empire were gathered.

⁵ Brennus, a Celtic general, in 390 B.C., sacked the city of Rome, before being driving out and defeated in battle. The Carthaginian general Hannibal laid siege to Rome in 211 BC. These have been the two episodes of greatest danger for Rome.

the Romans and completely destroyed. Instead, Gaul and Britannia (at present France and England), conquered by Julius Cæsar and Claudius⁶, quickly became Latinized.



7. Julius Cæsar *Imperator*

The Romans recognized that the Religion of the Celts and the secret teachings of their Druids were very similar to Pythagoreanism. Rome, therefore, respected the religion of the Celts, but were never too fond of it, considering the Gauls a barbaric and potentially hostile population.

Wherever the dominion of Rome extended, the Roman Peace (*Pax Romana*) was established. Roman citizenship was granted to many of the subjugated kingdoms, so the members of the knight class also increased strengthening the army. For many centuries within the Empire there were no more wars to fight and, therefore, the State prospered. In the first century AD, the city of Rome (*Urbs Romæ*) reached four million inhabitants. The capital (*Urbs*), as well as other cities, were adorned with splendid temples and palaces.



8. Roman temples and palaces

Paved roads connected all the provinces and everywhere aqueducts channeled the water from the mountains to the houses of private families.

⁶ Julius was the family name (*gotra*) of Cæsar because he was direct descendant of Julius, son of the Trojan hero Æneas. The name of Cæsar became so prestigious that his name is used to define the "Emperor" in two languages: in German "Kaiser" and in Russian "Czar". The Emperor Claudius conquered the present-day England in 43 AD.



9. A Roman aqueduct

In that period of splendour, the austere spirit of the Romans began to be soften and corrupt, mostly due to the influence of Greek lifestyle. The struggle between social classes germinated under the influence of Athenian democracy. Thus, the highest initiates of the Pythagorean mysteries joined their forces with those of the chivalric initiation. A circle was formed around the knight Mecenass, collecting the greatest Pythagorean poets such as Virgil⁷, Horace, Propertius and Tibullus. They induced the patrician Augustus, head of the Roman army (*Imperator*) and nephew of Julius Cæsar, to superimpose his authority as master of the knights to that of the Chiefs of the State, the two Consuls. Thus the title of Emperor acquired its current meaning as supreme head of the Empire. This was not really a *coup d'état*, because the State, as a civil entity, agreed to voluntarily submit to an initiatic authority, that was recognized superior by nature⁸. The Emperor, in addition to being the head of all the Roman initiatory organizations and Commander-in-Chief of the Army, was also *Rex Sacrorum* and *Pontifex Maximus*.



10. Augustus *Imperator* and *Rex Sacrorum*

Therefore, in some way, this reform represented a sacralisation of the State and the restoration of the ancient Roman Kingdom. Only the Senate was allowed to maintain its power of control in order to prevent the Emperor from being tempted to become a tyrant. With Augustus (63 BC-14 AD) and his imperial Julia dynasty, Rome reached its maximum power and splendour.

⁷ Virgil has been the *guru* of that Pythagorean poet group. His poem, the *Aeneid*, became the epic of Rome's past. The poem, accompanied by doctrinal teachings and initiatic symbols, tells of the Trojan origins of the city of Rome. The masterly fame of Virgil was recognized for many centuries. For this reason Dante Alighieri chose Virgil as the guide for his journey in the three worlds.

⁸ The only historical comparable example was when the Dalai Lama, the highest initiatic authority of *Vajrayāna* Buddhism, was recognized superior to the King of Tibet, becoming the head of that state. The difference is that the Dalai Lama is a monk, instead the Roman *Imperator* was a general.



1. S.P.Q.R., the symbol of Roman Empire

(Senatus Populusque Quiritium Romanorum, Senate and People of the Roman Quirits)

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