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**Rome on the Move**

THE APPIAN WAY, OR VIA APPIA, AS IT WAS KNOWN TO THE ANCIENT ROMANS, IS A VERY LONG ROAD. IT BEGINS OUTSIDE THE WALLS OF ROME, EXTENDS THROUGH the rolling hills of Campania in central Italy, and ultimately thrusts its way eastward through Samnium to the Adriatic Sea. Begun in 312 B.C. and finished almost 200 years later, this road was much more than a way to go from one town to another. Where it went and how it developed is a symbolic time line of Rome's gradual change from a small village to a superpower of the ancient world. Where Rome conquered, the Via Appia soon followed, ultimately reaching the sea and the ports that send Roman armies to distant lands.

In 390 B.C.--many years before construction began on the Via Appia--the Romans learned a lesson that would force them to consider the merits of a highway system. At the time, Rome was a small, vulnerable target for invading armies. One group of intruders from the north, the Gauls, took advantage of this opportunity. They attacked the Romans by surprise, plundered the city, and left it in ruins. Only the Gallic desire to return home saved the city from being burned to the ground. The lesson learned? The Romans needed to protect themselves and, at the same time, communicate with the rest of Italy more effectively.

For the next 50 years, Rome was in a state of recovery. Not only did its people have to rebuild the city, but they also had to reestablish authority in the region. Having accomplished these goals, the Romans were on the move once more. To the south and east of Rome lived tribes of nomads that were bound loosely together into a group known as the Samnites. These nomads regularly attacked towns along the southern borders of Latium that had allied themselves with Rome. Mindful of the Gallic invasion and determined to stop all would-be invaders, the Romans waged three long and costly wars against the Samnites from 343 B.C. to 290 B.C.

The Second Samnite War threatened Rome's very existence. In 321 B.C., Roman and Samnite armies met at the Caudine Forks, a narrow passage through the Apennine Mountains. Hoping to surprise the enemy, the Romans themselves were taken by surprise and ambushed. They had two options: death, or admit defeat and march in procession under the yoke--a humiliating ceremony. The Romans chose the second because they knew that if they chose death, nothing would have stood between the Samnites and Rome. Stripped of every possession except a tunic, and with the enemy screaming at them, Rome's soldiers had to walk like a herd of cows under a yoke (a large wooden collar used on oxen for plowing fields) as a sign of their submission to the Samnites.

But the Romans were not a people to accept humiliation or defeat. By the end of the Second Samnite War, they had reasserted their control over most of the region. In a show of strength and with the goal of providing a way to transport soldiers quickly to southern Italy, they began construction of the Via Appia.

Peace, however, did not last long. As soon as the Romans defeated one foreign enemy, a new and even more distant one challenged their might. Once they controlled most of central Italy, their new neighbors, the Greeks, who lived in southern Italy, saw Rome as a threat. Southern Italy was, in fact, known as Magna Graecia ("Great Greece"), and those who lived there kept in close contact with their homeland. They also depended upon mercenaries (soldiers who fight for pay in a foreign army) to fight their wars. Alarmed by the seemingly unending Roman drive to move forward, the Greeks in Magna Graecia chose war to protect their freedom and sought the aid of Pyrrhus, the ruler of Epirus in western Greece.

The three battles Rome fought against Pyrrhus decided the fate of all Italy. The first, in 280 B.C. at Heraclea, is the origin of the modern expression "a Pyrrhic victory." Pyrrhus led 25,000 men and 20 elephants against the Romans and won, but he lost as many soldiers as did the Romans. After the battle, Pyrrhus supposedly told his generals, "If we win another battle like this, we will lose the war."

The results also stunned the Romans. Their losses were great, and this was the first time they had ever faced elephants--the tanks of the ancient world--in battle. The following year, Pyrrhus again defeated the Romans, with a similar outcome. What saved the Romans was their resilience and drive to protect Rome. Unlike Pyrrhus, however, the Romans had an almost unending supply of manpower, and, after two battles, they had learned how to defeat elephants. By 275 B.C., they were ready to face Pyrrhus a third time. The two armies met near a small town called Maleventum ("bad wind"). The Romans were victorious, and the town's name was changed to Beneventum ("good wind"). The undisputed master of Italy, Rome extended the Via Appia eastward and turned its attention to cities beyond the shores of Italy.

An immediate result of the war was the fact that other superpowers of the time began to notice Rome. Carthage in north Africa was the first, and a minor dispute over control of the tiny northern Sicilian town of Messana brought them into a conflict far larger in scope than any previous war. From 264 to 241 B.C., these two nations fought in Sicily, Africa, and Spain. This war, known to history as the First Punic War, cost each side nearly 100,000 men. In the end, Rome was victorious, and the islands of Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica were added to its territory.

Twenty years later, Rome and Carthage met again on the battlefield. Hannibal, the Carthaginian general and sworn enemy of Rome, marched from Spain across the Alps and into Italy. Three major battles followed, each with Carthage the victor. The loss of life was staggering. In 216 B.C., at the battle of Cannae, Rome lost nearly 80,000 soldiers in one day. Once again, it was Rome's resilience that saved it in its war against the Carthaginians. Eventually, the Romans forced Hannibal back to Carthage. The years of wandering in Italy had taken their toll, however, and he could not defeat the fresh Roman soldiers invading his homeland.

Approximately 70 years later--in 146 B.C.--Rome again defeated Carthage. At the end of the Third Punic War, Rome's leaders gave the order to bum Carthage to the ground. More symbolic than necessary, the destruction of the city demonstrated Rome's might as the greatest power in the western Mediterranean. The Romans had endured 250 years of, fighting enemies abroad, resisted attacks upon their dry, and demonstrated a steadfast resistance to both conquerors and defeat. Therefore, it is no surprise that the ancient Roman historian Livy wrote, "Any other nation would have been destroyed by the weight of such disaster."

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Gale Document Number:A95148091 2011 Gale, Cengage Learning.