

How Rome grew into an empire

There were settlers in the Tiber valley some 300 years before the legendary twins Romulus and Remus are said to have staked their claim in 753BC. By 509BC, when the Republic was born, Rome was already thriving. Over 200 years, its influence expanded throughout the Italian peninsula, until its interests begin to clash with Carthage c270BC. Three ensuing Punic wars gave Rome most of the western Mediterranean and Numidia (present-day Tunisia). By 133BC, eastern Mediterranean protectorates came under direct rule. Around 44BC Julius Caesar led conquests of more of north Africa, Gaul and Asia, and Rome became an empire. As the millennium turned, Rome held sway over north Africa, Asia Minor and Syria, west to the Atlantic and north to the Rhine. But by the time it reached its greatest extent in AD117, the Roman Empire was already overstretched. The story thereafter is one of consolidation, then defence, then retreat. Successive waves of invasions overwhelmed the frontiers, until Rome itself was sacked in AD410. **DH**

