

Winter History & Heritage -- #8 (Feb. 17)

The High Old Roman Virtue --- (Kirk; *Roots of American Order*, pp. 97-105)

This phrase encapsulates the manly integrity which, ancient authorities agreed, made the Romans masters of the Mediterranean by the mid-2nd-century BC (c. 150)? Polybius (200--118 BC), for example, lauded their sense of duty, their frugality, and their basic honesty, as well as the near incorruptibility of the Republic's officials in his day. Seemingly, it was their piety (respect for the faith of their fathers), social mores (communal moral habits), and polity (mixed political order) that served them well.

The Constitution of the Roman Republic --- (Kirk; *Roots*, pp. 97-105)

This ancient political standard, according to the Greek historian Polybius, was the product of experience (not philosophic speculation) and was characterized by polity? The standard consisted in 3 elements—consulate, senate, and popular assemblies—each with its own powers and each invested with a capacity to check the others. The American Founders, millennia later, took note, designing the 3 branches of the U.S. after the ancient prototype, other historic parallels, and their own colonial governments.

Patricians vs. Plebeians --- (Kirk; *Roots*, pp. 97-105)

This classic political contest or power struggle in the old Roman Republic pitted nobles against commoners or the upper class against the lower? The upper class, mostly agrarian and descended from original Romans, supplied the senate; the lower consisted in sons of foreigners (subdued tribes) and fugitives who made their way to Rome. By 286 BC, the commoners gained full citizenship, thereby relieving tensions and making way for a senatorial class marked less by birth than by wealth and talent.

Punic Wars --- (Kirk; *Roots*, pp. 97-105)

These three wars with Carthage (264--146 BC), costly successes for Rome, must be numbered among the causes of the decline and fall of the Old Republic? Rome's triumph led to a swelling of her might in the Mediterranean, but the price in blood and treasure (the decimated ranks of the pious peasantry especially) proved too much. Aliens abroad had to be kept in line, and aliens flooding Italy had to be assimilated; circumstances thus drained the commonwealth's wealth, material and spiritual.

Piety (Pietas) --- (Kirk; *Roots*, pp. 97-105)

This virtue or character quality, "the foundation of all the other virtues" wrote Cicero, was the essence, the dynamic center of the Old Roman Republic in its better days? Above all, it implied dutiful loyalty to the heritage of one's fathers: to the gods, to family, to society, and to the state. Far better to die, the agrarian republican stalwarts believed, than to live and be found wanting in the trait serving to link the past with the future, the fathers with their children, heaven with earth, and the gods with men.

(sources for the summaries are indicated; any errors of judgment belong to Mr. Zaffini, Veritas history teacher and writer of this blog for his students & families)