IN a.D. 144 a Greek orator traveled from Asia Minor to Rome and there delivered in Greek a famous oration in praise of Rome. Among other remarks, he asserted to the Romans that “all the civilized world [i.e., the Mediterranean] raises with one voice the prayer that your Empire may endure in eternity.” The name of this orator, Aelius Aristides, was half-Greek, half-Latin.

Such a person must appear remarkable to anyone who has ever looked at the Greeks of the classic period with their haughty division of the world between “Greek” and “barbarian,” their narrow city-state loyalties, their dislike of autocracy. To explain how a Greek of the second century after Christ could express such ideas, we must consider the emergence into civilization of the power which he praised so highly, the Roman Empire. Particularly significant in the story are the creation by Rome of a political and military machinery with which it could conquer the Mediterranean, the effects of that conquest upon Rome, and the fusion of Roman culture with Greek civilization. The resulting urban, Mediterranean civilization which threw after the establishment of the celebrated “Roman peace” forms a summation of ancient civilization on which all later ages have directly built.
CHAPTER I

Geography and Peoples

of Ancient Italy

ITALY occupies the central position in the Mediterranean. It is otherwise favored by nature to such an extent that in modern times it has been the only purely Mediterranean state to claim the title of “great power.” Essentially Italy is a long, narrow peninsula running south-southeast from the European continent, 650 miles in length and varying between 100 and 150 miles in width. On the east it looks across the cold, stormy Adriatic to the abrupt coasts of modern Yugoslavia and Albania; on the west its shores are bathed by the gentle Tyrrhenian Sea, which stretches west and south to the islands of Corsica, Sardinia, and Sicily.

Geographically Italy is divided into two almost equal, but quite dissimilar, regions. One is peninsular Italy, which is a typically Mediterranean land; the other is the area to the north drained by the Po River and its associated streams. This continental Italy partakes of the characteristics of the European continent, from which it is separated by the mighty sweep of the Alps. In medieval and modern times the north has led in Italian development; in the ancient world areas closer to the major Mediterranean center of civilization were more progressive.
The main mountain chain in Italy is that of the Apennines. Thrown up in relatively recent geological times, these limestone mountains still have sharp outlines but do not rise above 10,000 feet. From the vicinity of Genoa the Apennines march almost straight east to the Adriatic, thus separating peninsular and continental Italy. They then hug the east coast, so leaving the rich volcanic lands of Etruria, Latium, and Campania to the west, but below Naples they cut back across the peninsula to the west coast and follow it southwards until they jump across to Sicily. The plains in southern Italy lie on the east coast, in dry, dusty Apulia. But one must not overemphasize the word “plains”—in Italy the hills are everywhere, sometimes connected in ridges which eventually lead back to the Apennines, sometimes rising by themselves, but all serving to divide the arable land into small sections. People live in clusters in Italy, often in stone villages which cling to the hillsides to gain a certain source of water, to avoid the rush of armies in the lowlands, and to spare the all-too-scarce good land for farming.

The climate of Italy is that of the Mediterranean generally, though modified somewhat to Italy’s advantage. During the winter the peninsula lies within the zone of the westerly winds, which bring rain in sudden storms. South of the Apennines the winter cold is tempered both by the warm Mediterranean Sea and by a good deal of sunshine—Rome is on the latitude of New York but enjoys the temperature range of the North Carolina coast. In the spring the westerlies begin their annual shift north away from the Mediterranean. In their place the Saharan blast furnace attracts from the European continent a rather steady northeast wind, devoid of rain. So sets in the summer drought; the rivers, recently in flood with the winter rains, dry up; and the fields
turn brown under the dazzling sun. The rainless months in Italy, however, are fewer than in Greece or Palestine. Sicily has four months without rain; Rome, usually less than two; and the Po Valley, which never entirely loses the rain-bringing westerlies, can also count on melting snow from the Alps to feed its rivers throughout the summer.

The Dominance of Agriculture

Italian terrain and climate alike tend to favor agriculture over industry and commerce. The limestone mountains covering much of Italy are almost devoid of minerals, which appear chiefly in the older crystalline layers of Etruria. Here early settlers mined copper and lead, and offshore in the island of Elba they found the chief source of Italian iron. These deposits probably were enough to satisfy the simpler economy of the ancient world, but tin and the precious metals in any quantity seem always to have been lacking. The general absence of navigable rivers and the regularity of the Italian coastline, which is particularly pronounced along the Adriatic, did not favor commerce. Some ports, however, were available on the southern and western shores by which trade with the more civilized eastern Mediterranean could be conducted.

Although Italy thus had some trade and some basis for industry, it was celebrated in antiquity chiefly for its forests, pastures, and fields. The Apennines seem to have been heavily timbered at the dawn of history; the Tiber, for instance, was long a logging stream, down which floated the cuttings of the central mountains. Since the ancients were as prodigal with their forests as modern man, the wooded areas of Italy constantly shrank, and by the time of Christ the more accessible slopes had been cleared. The devastation was assisted
by the ubiquitous goats, who ate off the seedlings. Once the rocky slopes lost their cover entirely, the soil washed quickly away, and today the slopes in heavily settled areas are bare or support only bushy growth.

The chief animals raised on Italian pastures were sheep and goats, because they were small, easily moved, and tolerant in diet. Since lowland pastures tended to dry up in the summer drought, grazing involved an annual cycle of movement, especially after the Romans had conquered all peninsular Italy. During the winter the animals lived in the lowlands, chiefly of Apulia; then, as summer came on, they were driven up into the mountains of central Italy along regular paths which are still in use today. Large herds of cattle and horses were to be found only where good pastures could be assured the year around, as along the coast or in the Po Valley; still they were more common in Italy than in the eastern Mediterranean. The term Italia itself means "calf-land."

Agriculture was the chief pursuit in historic times, but its rhythm was (and is) quite different from that which we know in the United States. In the first place, the Mediterranean climate dictates a concentration of most crops in the rainy season from autumn through spring. The Italian farmer planted his barley or wheat in the fall (from September on) so that it could germinate with the fall rains, live through the relatively mild winter, and come to maturity with the spring rains for a harvest in May or June. Grapes and olives, both very important in the farmer's economy, were harvested in the fall, but were so long-rooted that they did not need irrigation through the summer drought.

Again, ancient agriculture required careful, intensive work. Usually one-half of a farmer's field would be left
fallow each year to regain its fertility. Agricultural experts advised that while fallow it be plowed three or even four times, in addition to manuring. Since the plow was light and had no colter, furrows were neither deep nor well broken; as the husband drove the oxen, the wife and children followed along behind the plow, breaking up the clods with hoes and other simple instruments. The fact that farms often were only two or three acres in size is more understandable when one considers the great amount of human effort required to extort food from the soil. As we follow Roman development, it is worth remembering that the men who made the history of Rome were trained in the hard life of the farm and that farming always remained their chief occupation. The rhythm of the agricultural year underlies the history of Italy.

To sum up the effects of geography on that history, one may say that Italy is primarily an agricultural area, which can support a relatively large population. In climate and terrain it is definitely Mediterranean, though its northern edge shades into continental European; northern Italy has frequently had invaders from across the Alps, while southern Italy has as often been invaded from the south or east. Farther from the seats of Oriental civilization than Greece, Italy would naturally be slower to pick up the developing culture of the eastern Mediterranean, but its southern and western coasts had receptive harbors for the foreign traders when they began to come west. Italy is well fitted to be the leader in a unified Mediterranean, but the peninsula itself is not easily to be united merely because it is marked off by seas and the Alps. On the contrary its hills and mountains tend to divide it sharply, and influences from without have
often pulled it apart. The Roman achievement in uniting its numerous peoples was a great one.

*Early Peoples*

The "dawn of history" came in Italy about 700 B.C. By this date a great deal had happened in Italy as well as in the rest of the Mediterranean world. Though Italy itself was thus far a backward area, it had passed through the Paleolithic and Neolithic ages, and was at 700 in an iron-age civilization. As a result of invasion by peoples from every possible direction, its population was a variegated mixture of four main stocks.

Two of these groups came during prehistoric times. The first was a Mediterranean-type people whom the gradual desiccation of the Sahara drove north from Africa about 5000 B.C. Short-limbed, long-headed, dark in skin, this stock furnished the physical base for the Italian people henceforth. In the main the African invaders were shepherds in a low level of Neolithic civilization. From the east they gradually picked up the use of copper and bronze, especially in south Italy and Sicily.

The second wave began moving about 2000 B.C. from the northeast across the eastern Alps, where there are broad, easy passes less than 3,000 feet in height. This wave, which spoke Indo-European dialects, was connected with parallel movements about the same time into Persia, Asia Minor (Hittites), and Greece. To Italy this element contributed the future language stock and also a great deal of its basic culture, for the invaders settled in villages and lived by agriculture. It appears that various echelons of people speaking Indo-European tongues came into Italy in the second millennium.
By 1000 iron had been introduced into Italy from an iron-using center in the Hungarian plain.

By 700 the first two peoples, those of Mediterranean type and those speaking Indo-European tongues, had merged and formed an agricultural civilization resting on the use of iron for tools and weapons. To take Latium as an example, the farmers lived together in villages, frequently but not universally perched in a defensible position above the Latin plain. Several villages formed a canton, and the Latin cantons felt a common bond, expressed chiefly in common religious ceremonies; but they might and did fight with each other. Within the villages the family was a remarkably strong social unit under the control of the father. Living in a world where his very existence depended on the forces of nature, a Latin farmer was deeply religious in an animistic sense, i.e., he believed that the world was full of spirits embodying the forces of nature that must be propitiated. At his death he would be cremated and his ashes buried in an urn shaped like his hut with high, thatched roof. While life essentially was much the same anywhere in Italy at this time, local differences in culture loomed large. In most parts of Italy the local dialects resembled Greek. This can be seen in the word pur meaning “fire,” which has survived today in our word “pyromaniac.” In Latium, however, the dialect which later became Latin most resembled the Lithuanian and Slavic tongues. In these ignis—as in our “igneous”—was the word for “fire.” Linguistically, politically, and culturally Italy started in diversity.

The remaining two stocks arrived at the dawn of history. Both the Etruscans and the Greeks came to Italy from the eastern Mediterranean and carried in their ships and minds much of the far more advanced civilization of that area.
Among other skills came the art of writing, so that truly historical material about early Italy begins to appear after 700. Once contact had been fully established between Italy and the East, it was never thereafter broken. The intensity of the connection varied from time to time but tended ever to increase; eventually the master of Italy was to turn to the east and conquer the area from which the peninsula had been civilized.

The Etruscans

The first of these two eastern peoples, the Etruscans, is, for the historian, one of the most puzzling and exasperating groups in the ancient world. It now appears that they came from Asia Minor about 850 b.c. Perhaps they were drawn by the mineral riches of Etruria; perhaps they were spurred by troubles at home. Probably we should visualize their movement as one of small groups, swooping down on the coast north of the Tiber, easily moving inland over the rolling ground of Etruria, then settling down in a chosen area as a governing minority. Their rapid conquest was facilitated by superior technique in war and by their closer social organization. Each group, as it established itself in an area, built a walled, hilltop city and fashioned about it a city-state, usually under a king or war-leader who later gave way to an aristocracy. Although twelve of the Etruscan states assembled in a religious union, they remained politically independent and rarely co-operated.

The Etruscans would be important if they had done no more than introduce into Italy the idea of the city-state; for, as the experience of Greece proves, the city-state form of organization released great social and political powers in ancient man. Rome eventually became such a state through
imagination of the Etruscan model and thereby started on its great path of expansion. The Etruscans, however, did much more for central Italy: they introduced many aspects of eastern Mediterranean civilization and at the same time took over a great deal from the native iron-age culture. Rarely original, they deftly combined elements from everywhere into a pleasure-loving civilization which baffled alike intellectual Greek and sober Roman.

Very largely they borrowed from the Greeks. Thus they took over the Greek alphabet before 700, altered it somewhat to fit their language, and passed it on to Rome; thanks to the Etruscans our alphabet today is short in vowels and redundant in the C, K, and Q group. Like the Greek, Etruscan sculpture emphasized the human in a naturalistic sense. In architecture and in all the arts Greek motifs and styles were usually dominant. The tombs of Etruria are so filled with vases from the great period of Athenian pottery that such vases were long known as "Etruscan."

Yet one is not long in feeling that despite their wide borrowing the Etruscans were unique in the ancient world. Their aim, to quote a sympathetic modern, was "the enjoyment of a fair existence and the delights it can offer." So they took what the world had to offer, but adapted it in rich, local variations. Their tombs were often decorated with gaily painted frescoes, depicting banquets or the like; in one early case the wall is a seascape where ducks and other birds flit about, dolphins jump out of the water, and men dive in from a steep rock. In the bulging muscles of Etruscan terra-cotta sculpture one senses the same realism and earthiness as in the low, earth-clinging temples of the Etruscan cities. The Romans could never understand or admire the Etruscans, and
in that antipathy one can learn a great deal about the character of both sides.

Politically the power of the Etruscans in Italy was both extensive and brief. After the easy conquest of Etruria independent bands swarmed north across the Apennines into the Po Valley in the sixth century. Even before this they had moved south, about 650, to Capua in Campania, proceeding by land and taking a good deal of Latium and also Rome in the process. By the beginning of the fifth century their power was falling as rapidly as it had risen, but in the meantime the Etruscans had done much to civilize central Italy.

The Greeks

Their southward expansion brought the Etruscans into direct contact with the Greek settlements in Italy. The resulting hostility goes far to explain the Etruscan decline. When the Greeks began to press out of the Aegean Sea in all directions after 800 B.C., the most favored area for settlement was south Italy and Sicily. This Greater Greece could easily be reached by a coasting voyage up the west coast of Greece to Corecyra and a short trip across the mouth of the Adriatic to the heel of Italy. Not only was the climate of the new area much like that of Greece, but also a number of good ports tempted the Greeks to explore the timber, wheat fields, and other resources of the western lands.

Greek settlement of Italy was largely a haphazard process in which various strains of the homeland were jumbled together, but each settlement or “colony” constituted an absolutely independent city-state. The Greek settlements stretched from Cumae on the Campanian coast, important in early Roman history, down the west coast and along the
The Emergence of Rome

...instep past Sybaris to Tarentum. In Sicily the Greeks took over the eastern two-thirds of the island; here Syracuse eventually became the most important state. Nor, though it is outside Italy, may one overlook Massilia (Marseilles) in southern France, which pushed its outposts down into Spain; for Massiliote ambitions and fears were often a pregnant force in Roman affairs. In all major particulars the civilization in these city-states was a part of general Hellenic culture. These western states had magnificent ambitions and built on a vaster scale than parent Greece, but their architecture, like their sculpture and thought, was on Greek lines.

Like the Etruscans and the Phoenicians in Africa, Sicily, and Spain the Greeks were expanding territorially in the sixth century. The result was a series of wars of great significance. At first the Etruscans and the Carthaginians, who now controlled the Phoenician settlements, united against the Greeks and stopped their expansion into Corsica and southern Spain. Then the allies went each his own way, with most disastrous results. The Carthaginians were defeated at Himera in Sicily in 480 and were so prevented from throwing the Greeks out of Sicily. The victor, Syracuse, joined Cumae in opposing the Etruscans on the sea in 474; we still have an Etruscan helmet which the ruler of Syracuse dedicated in triumph at Delphi.

The result of these wars was to ensure that no one foreign power was to be dominant in Italy. The Carthaginians were to continue to control western Sicily, Africa, and most of Spain until Rome crushed them in the Punic Wars; the Etruscans were to hold central Italy in a loose, more and more inert grip until the Romans were ready to take it over; the Greeks, potentially most powerful of the three, tore each other to pieces in interstate rivalry and eventually fell
almost thankfully into Rome's hands. Their gallant fight against the other two had made it clear that the lasting foreign influence in Italy was to be Greek. Unconsciously the Greeks had protected Rome in its early days, and they were eventually to lead her into her first overseas expansion. In 500, however, it should be noted that Greek civilization, though vigorous, had not yet reached its great heights of the Periclean Age.

After the close of the wars of the sixth century most of Italy was still politically independent, though the Indo-European peoples occupying it were steadily more influenced by cultural currents from the East. The question now was: Which of the local peoples was to be the one to conquer the peninsula, if indeed any were to carry out the difficult task of unifying the whole of Italy?
CHAPTER II

The Rise of Rome in Italy

The largest river on the western coast of Italy is the Tiber, which in antiquity was a natural artery of trade both for foreign goods and for the salt obtained at its mouth. The key position along the stream lay at a point 15 miles inland. Here an island in the Tiber marked the end of navigation for ancient seagoing vessels and also afforded an easy crossing for the north-south trade route along the coast. The low land of the coast yields at this point to hillocks, some rising in isolation close to the river, others running out from the plateau toward the stream. This strategic position was the site of Rome.

The City-State of Rome

The hills of Rome seem to have borne scattered villages from 1000 B.C. On the Palatine, overlooking the Tiber island, lived Latins; and on the other hills lived Sabines from the central mountains. These villages apparently united in a religious league; and then, shortly before 600 B.C., they took the decisive step of coming together in a city-state ruled by a king. A sewer (cloaca maxima) was built to drain the swamp below the Palatine and the reclaimed area became the market, the forum, of the new city. Rome was now in existence.