



# The Rise of Rome: The Making of the World's Greatest Empire

*By Anthony Everitt*

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From Anthony Everitt, the bestselling author of acclaimed biographies of Cicero, Augustus, and Hadrian, comes a riveting, magisterial account of Rome and its remarkable ascent from an obscure agrarian backwater to the greatest empire the world has ever known.

Emerging as a market town from a cluster of hill villages in the eighth and seventh centuries B.C., Rome grew to become the ancient world's preeminent power. Everitt fashions the story of Rome's rise to glory into an erudite page-turner filled with lasting lessons for our time. He chronicles the clash between patricians and plebeians that defined the politics of the Republic. He shows how Rome's shrewd strategy of offering citizenship to her defeated subjects was instrumental in expanding the reach of her burgeoning empire. And he outlines the corrosion of constitutional norms that accompanied Rome's imperial expansion, as old habits of political compromise gave way, leading to violence and civil war. In the end, unimaginable wealth and power corrupted the traditional virtues of the Republic, and Rome was left triumphant everywhere except within its own borders.

Everitt paints indelible portraits of the great Romans—and non-Romans—who left their mark on the world out of which the mighty empire grew: Cincinnatus, Rome's George Washington, the very model of the patrician warrior/aristocrat; the brilliant general Scipio Africanus, who turned back a challenge from the Carthaginian legend Hannibal; and Alexander the Great, the invincible Macedonian conqueror who became a role model for generations of would-be Roman rulers. Here also are the intellectual and philosophical leaders whose observations on the art of government and "the good life" have inspired every Western power from antiquity to the present: Cato the Elder, the famously incorruptible statesman who spoke out against the decadence of his times, and Cicero, the consummate orator whose championing of republican institutions put him on a collision course with Julius Caesar and whose writings on justice and

liberty continue to inform our political discourse today.

Rome's decline and fall have long fascinated historians, but the story of how the empire was won is every bit as compelling. With *The Rise of Rome*, one of our most revered chroniclers of the ancient world tells that tale in a way that will galvanize, inform, and enlighten modern readers.

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"An engrossing history of a relentlessly pugnacious city's 500-year rise to empire."—*Kirkus Reviews*

"Rome's history abounds with remarkable figures. . . . Everitt writes for the informed and the uninformed general reader alike, in a brisk, conversational style, with a modern attitude of skepticism and realism."—*The Dallas Morning News*

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"[An] engaging work that will captivate and inform from beginning to end."—*Booklist*

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### **The Rise of Rome: The Making of the World's Greatest Empire By Anthony Everitt Bibliography**

- Sales Rank: #137234 in Books
- Brand: Random House Trade Paperbacks
- Published on: 2013-11-12
- Released on: 2013-11-12
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.40" h x 1.11" w x 6.12" l, 1.12 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 512 pages

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#### Review

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#### About the Author

**Anthony Everitt**, sometime visiting professor in the visual and performing arts at Nottingham Trent University, has written extensively on European culture and is the author of *Cicero*, *Augustus*, and *Hadrian and the Triumph of Rome*. He has served as secretary general of the Arts Council of Great Britain. Everitt lives near Colchester, England’s first recorded town, founded by the Romans.

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I

#### Legend

1

#### A New Troy

The origin of rome can be traced back to a giant of a wooden horse.

for ten years a coalition of Greek rulers besieged Troy, a mighty city-state at the foot of the Dardanelles, on the coast of what is now northwest Turkey. The expeditionary force was there largely thanks to the machinations of three deities: Juno, the wife of the king of the gods, Jupiter; Minerva, whose specialty was wisdom; and the goddess of sexual passion, Venus. They were competing for a golden apple inscribed with the words “A prize for the most beautiful.” Not even their fellow gods dared to judge among these potent and easily offended creatures, and so it was decided that the poisoned choice would be handed to a mortal, a young shepherd named Paris, who tended his flock on the slopes of Mount Ida, a few miles from Troy. His only qualification appears to have been astonishing good looks, for there was nothing in his character to mark him out from the crowd.

The goddesses duly turned up without a stitch of clothing on among them. Not being above bribery, they

offered, respectively, the gifts of power, of knowledge—and of access to the most beautiful woman in the world, Helen, the queen of Sparta. Feckless and randy, Paris accepted the third offer and awarded the apple to Venus. The losers stormed off, plotting vengeance.

It transpired that Paris was actually of royal blood. His father was Priam, the king of Troy. When his mother was carrying him, she dreamed that she would give birth not to a baby but to a flaming torch. This was a serious warning from the gods of future disaster, and the couple arranged for a shepherd to leave the baby exposed on a mountainside (a regular means of eliminating unwanted infants in the classical world), to be eaten by wild animals. The shepherd didn't have the heart to obey, and brought the boy up himself.

Once the youth's true identity was revealed, his parents put the bad dream to the back of their minds and acknowledged him as their son. Priam dispatched him with a fleet to conduct a friendship tour of the isles of Greece. Paris had a better idea. He made straight for Sparta and the court of Menelaus and his wife, Helen. Helen was even more beautiful than he had imagined. While Menelaus was away on a visit to Crete, he eloped with her and sailed back to Troy with his prize.

Although Priam recognized that his son had broken the laws of hospitality by stealing another man's wife, he unwisely received the couple within his walls. He should have realized that he was welcoming a lighted torch into his city, just as his wife's dream had foretold.

The cuckolded husband's brother was the federal overlord of innumerable Greek statelets. Together they won the support of their fellow rulers and a combined army set off for Troy, to retrieve Helen and punish the city that had taken her in. Ten wearying years passed, full of incident but without a decisive victory for either side. The most notable event took place in the ninth year of the siege. This was a prolonged sulk by the Greeks' greatest military asset, the youthful but hot-tempered Achilles.

A handsome redhead, he was brought up as a girl among a sister-hood of girls, according to one tradition. This was because his mother, Thetis, a granddaughter of the sea god Poseidon (the Roman Neptune), foresaw that his fate was either to win eternal fame and die early or to live a long life in obscurity. As a loving parent, she opted for longevity. Achilles, who was given a female name, Pyrrha (Greek for "flame-colored," in tribute to his hair), was pretty enough for the ruse to go undetected for some time—until the boy got one of his fellow schoolgirls pregnant. Once permitted to be male, he rejected his mother's wishes and opted for glory. He soon became known as a great warrior and went happily off to fight at Troy, in the full knowledge that he would never return.

Battles in this heroic age were not fought by disciplined groups of men, according to epic poets such as Homer, but were in effect a series of simultaneous individual combats or duels between kings and noblemen. The rank and file took their cue from the success or failure of their champions. After a quarrel with the commander-in-chief, Achilles stayed in his tent and refused to join the battle. However, he allowed his dear friend, and (some said) lover, Patroclus, to borrow his armor and fight on his behalf. Patroclus was killed, and his death brought the Greek hero raging back onto the battlefield, where he dispatched Hector, Troy's bravest champion and Priam's firstborn son.

Achilles was soon dead himself, shot by an arrow from the bow of Paris. Then Paris, the cause of all this woe, was felled, the victim of another archer. The war had arrived at a stalemate.

Openhearted and fearless, honorable but unrelenting in revenge, Achilles was an iconic figure in the ancient world. Young Greeks and Romans through the centuries admired him and wanted to be like him. The Macedonian conqueror Alexander the Great kept by his bedside a copy of Homer's *Iliad*, whose unparalleled

poetry celebrates the wrath of Achilles.

one morning, trojans manning the walls looked seaward and were amazed by what they saw. The Greek camp alongside the beach was deserted and the fleet was gone. It was evident that the war was over and the invaders were on their way home. The people flooded out of the city in a state of great enthusiasm. They were puzzled by the sight of an enormous wooden horse, but a Greek deserter told them that it was an offering to Minerva. Apparently, a seer had announced that if the Trojans destroyed it they would provoke her resentment, but if they brought it inside the city she would become their protector, despite the unpleasant business of the golden apple.

A few voices argued that the horse should be burned or pushed into the sea, but it was eventually decided to drag it into Troy. The city gate was too small to admit it, so part of the wall had to be knocked down to make room. The evening was given over to feasting and drinking. Sentries were not posted, and when the revelers at last went to their beds the sleeping city lay defenseless beneath the stars.

of course, the Greeks had not departed. Their fleet had harbored behind the offshore island of Tenedos, a few miles down the coast, and awaited nightfall before returning to Troy. Ulysses, the crafty ruler of Ithaca, an island in the Ionian Sea, had devised a cunning plan. The wooden horse was his idea, and it was designed with an internal compartment capable of housing twenty armed men. He briefed the soi-disant defector to tell his entirely fictional story. In the early hours, the man opened a hidden door and let out the soldiers who were locked inside. Meanwhile, a Greek force marched from the shore and entered the city without let or hindrance.

Aeneas, a member of a junior branch of the Trojan royal family and the son-in-law of Priam, had gone to sleep that night in the house of his father, Anchises, in a secluded quarter of the city. His mother was Venus, active as ever in the affairs, and the affaires de coeur, of Troy, who had seduced Anchises in his youth and detained him for nearly two weeks of nonstop lovemaking. Aeneas had a nightmare in which Achilles' victim, his body covered with dust and blood, warned him that the city had been captured and was in flames; it was his duty to escape. He woke up to find that this was indeed the case. Climbing to the roof of the house, he saw fires blazing in every direction.

Aeneas realized that nothing could be done to reverse the catastrophe. As the dream had told him, it was his sacred obligation to lead a party of survivors, and refound Troy elsewhere. He took with him the city's penates, images of its household gods, and (some said) the celebrated Palladium, an ancient, sacred wooden statue of Minerva that had fallen from the sky.

The small company, which included Aeneas's aged father and his young son Ascanius, also known as Iulus, made its way to one of the city gates, using dark side streets and avoiding Greek marauders. The Trojan prince suddenly realized that his wife was missing, and rushed back to look for her, without success. Returning empty-handed at dawn, he was surprised to find a large crowd of refugees awaiting his orders.

According to another narrative, Aeneas was in charge of allied reinforcements that withdrew to Troy's citadel and prevented the enemy from taking the entire city. He created enough of a distraction to allow much of the civilian population to escape and, after negotiating a cease-fire with the Greeks, marched his people out of Troy in good order.

One way or another, a fair number of Trojans had survived, and under Aeneas's command a decision was taken to leave their native land forever. A fleet was built, and the party sailed away with no certain destination. The idea was to find somewhere to settle and establish a new national home.

This was more easily said than done. Abortive attempts were made to found a city in Thrace and Crete. Aeneas spent some time with a relative who had become ruler in Epirus, on the western coast of Greece, after the assassination of Achilles' son, Pyrrhus, the country's brutal young king. This relative advised Aeneas to make for Italy. However, the unforgetting goddesses Juno and Minerva were determined to prevent a rebirth of the hated Troy, and Aeneas was forced to undergo many dangerous adventures. Like Ulysses before him on his long journey back to Ithaca, he had a narrow escape from the one-eyed giant Polyphemus. Finally, the Trojans were blown off course by a storm and shipwrecked on the coast of North Africa.

they found that they were not the only refugees seeking a new world. A group of Phoenician expatriates were building a settlement on a strip of coast leased from local tribes. They originated from the great island port of Tyre, in what is now Lebanon.

Tyre was a monarchy. Its unscrupulous ruler had arranged the murder of a wealthy landowner and confiscated his estates. The dead man's widow, Dido, assembled a large community of people who either hated or feared their king and (prompted by her husband's helpful ghost) unearthed a secret hoard of gold to fund her expenses. Seizing some ships in the harbor, she and her followers made good their escape.

They were building Carthage (Phoenician for "new city") on part of a large promontory backed by two lagoons to the north and south when the Trojans arrived, storm-shaken, caked with brine, and exhausted. They were amazed, and doubtless a little jealous, at what they saw.

Virgil, Rome's national poet and the author of the Aeneid, an epic poem on the adventures of Aeneas, imagines the scene:

Aeneas looked wonderingly at the solid structures springing up where there had once been only African huts, and at the gates, the turmoil, and the paved streets. The Tyrians were hurrying about busily, some tracing a line for the walls and manhandling stones up the slopes as they strained to build their citadel, and others siting some building and marking its outline by ploughing a furrow.

Dido welcomed the strangers and, hearing their story, sympathized with Aeneas for his misfortunes. The goddess Juno now found herself in an uncomfortable position; if Aeneas could be persuaded to make Carthage his home, he would abandon the glorious future in Italy that had been prophesied for him and there would no longer be any risk of a new Troy rising from the ground. Unfortunately, though, the despised Trojan would have to marry Dido, a favorite of hers, as indeed was Carthage. This was a bitter sacrifice, but she had no choice but to make it.

Arrangements were made with the cooperation of Venus, and the queen of Carthage duly fell in love with the exile. On a hunting expedition in the hills, Juno arranged for a fortuitous thunderstorm and the couple took refuge in a cave, where nature followed its pleasant course. Dido called the encounter a wedding.

Unfortunately, a local African chieftain had had his eye on Dido for himself, and did not want to lose her. He was a great devotee of Jupiter and prayed to him for help. He complained, "Now this second Paris, wearing a Phrygian bonnet to tie up his chin and cover his oily hair, and attended by a train of she-men, is to become the owner of what he has stolen."

Jupiter had known nothing of his wife's plot and was furious. He immediately dispatched a messenger to warn the Trojan prince to remember his destiny and leave at once for Italy. Aeneas the True (so called because of his reputation for loyalty) was thunderstruck by the rebuke and abandoned Dido without delay.



Thoroughly embarrassed, he tried to justify himself to her, placing the blame on the king of the gods. “So stop upsetting yourself, and me too, by these protests,” he said. “It is not by my own choice that I voyage onward toward Italy.”

Dido, spurned, chose to die. She had a great funeral pyre built, letting it be known that her purpose was to incinerate a sword Aeneas had left behind, some of his clothes, and his portrait. This was a ruse, for the pyre was for her own use. She climbed up onto it and stabbed herself. Before dying, she uttered a curse, predicting eternal enmity between her new city and the one her Trojan lover and his posterity would found in Italy:

Neither love nor compact shall there be between the nations. And from my dead bones may some avenger arise to persecute with fire and sword these settlers from Troy, soon or in after-time, whenever the strength is given! Let your shores oppose their shores, your waves their waves, your arms their arms. That is my imprecation. Let them fight, they, and their sons’ sons, for ever!

At long last, Aeneas and his companions reached Italy. As they sailed along its western coast, a large wood came into view through which the yellow waters of the river Tiber poured into the sea; and here the Trojans disembarked. Their voyage was at an end. They were greeted by Latinus, the old and henpecked king of the Latini, a tribe living between the Tiber and Anio rivers, from which Latium (today’s Lazio) gets its name. He and his people were of Greek origin. Thanks to his wife’s influence, his daughter Lavinia had been promised to Turnus, the young and energetic chief of the Rutulians. The king for once stood up for himself; he now changed his mind and gave her to the Trojan newcomer.

War was the inevitable outcome, and Aeneas killed Turnus in single combat. Following this victory he founded the city of Lavinium, named after his wife. The Rutulians were down but not out. Hostilities were resumed and a great battle was fought beside the river Numicius, near Lavinium. There were many casualties, and when night fell the armies separated.

Aeneas, though, had vanished. Some thought he had been translated to the gods, others that he had drowned. His mother, never knowingly worsted, arranged for him to be deified. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, an antiquarian who flourished in the first century a.d., reports that, in his day, a memorial was still standing on the site of the battle. It was a small mound around which stood regular rows of trees. An inscription read, “To the father and god of this place, who presides over the waters of the river Numicius.”

Seven years had passed since Aeneas left the smoldering ruins of Troy.

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