

# THE ROMANS

## 2. THE ROMAN EMPIRE

JULIA: I'm helping out with this archaeological dig at Hadrian's Wall in the North of England. This wall was built nearly two thousand years ago by the Romans, and the things found here tell us a lot about life at the time. Wow! A coin!! It's got a head on it! It's emperor....Trajan. Finding a coin like this is like finding treasure. Not because it's worth a lot of money, but because of what it tells us about the past. In fact, if you want to learn about Ancient Rome, then follow the money!

Emperor Trajan was born in what is now Spain. But how does a ruler that was born in Spain and lived in Italy end up on a coin that was used in the North of England?

Well, at that time all these places were part of the Roman Empire. An empire is a group of lands all ruled from one place...and the Roman Empire was ruled from Rome.

It all began about two thousand five hundred years ago. Back then, the Romans were just one of many groups of people living in what we now call Italy. They didn't have an empire, or an emperor. Instead, they were ruled by kings. When countries are ruled by kings or queens, it's called a 'monarchy'.

The first six kings were ok, but the seventh, Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, was a nasty piece of work. He treated the people of Rome very badly, so in 509 BCE, they decided they'd had enough of the monarchy.

They formed a republic, which is when the country is run by its people, and not just one person or family. Instead of a king, they had two men called consuls, who were chosen by some of the people. Women weren't allowed to be consuls! And unlike kings, who stayed in charge until they died, consuls were only allowed to be in charge for one year and because there were two of them, one person didn't have too much power. They got advice from the senate, a group of people, called senators, who came up with ideas about how to run the republic. And just like the consuls, only men were allowed to be senators.

Over two hundred years and many wars and battles later, the Roman Republic grew to take over most of what is now Italy...and by 100BCE it had grown even larger, reaching Asia and North Africa. All these new lands paid taxes to Rome which became richer than ever before.

But not everyone was having a good time. It was great if you were in power, but for many people their lives had got harder, even though Rome had become wealthier and more powerful. Fighting broke out when ordinary people without power tried to change how Rome was governed.

But for one man this was just another opportunity. Julius Caesar had already made a name for himself conquering the land of Gaul in what is now France. He wanted to take control of



the republic and marched his armies from Gaul to Rome, causing a war between the people of Rome that lasted nearly five years. When Julius Caesar finally won the war, he let the senate continue, but he really took all the power for himself. The senators were not happy and some decided the only thing they could do was to kill him.

But it wasn't long before the people of Rome were fighting each other again! Until Gaius Octavius took power, becoming the first emperor, Emperor Augustus, which is when the republic became an empire. The senate still gave advice, but the emperor, rather than the people had the real power. The empire lasted over five hundred years, but after losing control of some of its lands, Rome gradually lost its power altogether and its empire was broken up. But its story lives on!