

AUTHOR'S NOTE



“To ignore the Romans is not just to turn a blind eye to the distant past. Rome still helps to define the way we understand our world and think about ourselves, from high theory to low comedy. After 2,000 years, it continues to underpin Western culture and politics, what we write and how we see the world, and our place in it.”

Mary Beard
Author & Classical Scholar

Salve, dear reader! You have now reached the end of **Book 2** in the **Deorum Legions** saga. I will admit, part two was perhaps my most challenging undertaking yet. After twelve drafts and a year later, I think I accomplished what I set out to do. Perhaps it isn't a *perfect* work of literature. I'm sure it still has numerous flaws. However, I *can* say with confidence that this is a worthy continuation to the story of **Velkan Aurelian**. But that, dear reader, is for *you* to judge.

Drucilla the Serpentess is a character I had wanted to write about for a long time. Originally, she appeared in the first draft of Book 1. But I decided to push her towards the next arc as things got overly convoluted. In hindsight, I feel that it was for the best. The Prophet, the Populares, Eidolons, Typhon, and even the Tartarus Crystals were all concepts that were initially slated for Book 1 but ended up getting removed. Hopefully, Book 2 was able to provide you with something that resembles an entertaining story.

One major concern I had during the writing process was the increased prevalence of political musings and various ideologies expressed by the characters. At first, I thought to purge such elements altogether; fearing that it would be seen as distasteful to modern audiences. But I felt that this would have crippled the narrative. The plot and story is predicated on the conflict between the social orders of the Republic.

Lucium and the greater region of Theia, despite being fictional, is still based on the Greco-Roman world of classic antiquity; my favorite time period to study. What I admire most about the ancient Romans, aside from their incredible engineering marvels, is how eerily similar they are to us, and we to them. Even though ancient Rome is long gone, their remarkable achievements still influence us to this very day.

Rome reached its greatest extent in the year 117 CE, under the emperor Trajan. Their vast and prosperous Mediterranean empire encompassed much of continental Europe, northern Africa, and western Asia. It stretched from far-flung frontiers such as Britannia to the fertile plains of Syria. At their zenith, the eternal city peaked at over a million people; while the wider empire was estimated to have ruled over 50 to 75 million people. Rome may not have been the *largest* empire in history, especially when compared to the

Mongol or British empires, but it certainly is one of the *most* pivotal regarding the development of Western Civilization and modernity in general. In many ways, ancient Rome is alive and well; practically preserved all around us.

When we think of the Romans, people tend to imagine mad emperors, legionary armies, and fearsome gladiators. Such iconography is deeply imbedded into the popular consciousness. But they were so much more than the war-loving imperialists we think of. Their very spirit dwells deep within the cultural genealogy of the West.

It survives in our written and spoken languages; many of which are directly influenced by their Latin script. Even English, a distinctly Germanic tongue, derives much from Latin. Roman law forms the foundational framework for many of our systems of governance and legal codices. Some of the roads in modern Europe still follow similar routes to the old networks paved by the Romans themselves. Our calendar, though based on the Gregorian scheme, is itself an iteration of the calendar enacted by the famous Julius Caesar from the late Republic era. Even the months themselves are based on Roman nomenclature. I was born on July 10, 1994; therefore I was birthed during the month of Julius.

When it comes to architecture, you can see evidence of Roman influence in just about every major city on Earth. If you ever get to visit Washington DC, you will be instantly captivated by the grandiose and sublime buildings that dot the American capital. The Lincoln Memorial is itself styled after a classical pagan temple that would have been common during the Greco-Roman period. The founding fathers of America were enamored with Rome. We have a Republic. We have a senate. We bear Roman symbols in our military and national branding. We still utilize Latin phrases in our

laws. We named the city of Cincinnati after a prolific Roman figure. Even our long-held religious beliefs and customs are directly handed down to us by them. And the strange rituals surrounding Marriage? We can also thank the Romans for that too.

But while the cultural and historical context for ancient political thought greatly differed from our own modern sensibilities, one could argue that there is also a sort of universality that we can all relate to. Many of the events portrayed in Book 2 may seem suspiciously anachronistic, but they are in fact loosely inspired by various historical accounts that were contemporary to ancient times.

The **Optimates** and **Populares** of Deorum Legions are taken from the real-world groups of the same name. These factions quarreled during the chaotic final years of the Roman Republic, with one representing the cause of the people, while the other fought to preserve the privileges of the wealthy patricians. The Gracchi brothers were statesmen who championed the plight of the plebs by promising land and wealth redistribution. However, they were killed by the very elites who sought to maintain the status quo.

What happens to the rights of the citizen in the eyes of the law? Should a traitor be executed or given due process? This was a question raised during the Catiline Conspiracy when then consul, Marcus Tullius Cicero, uncovered a plot to overthrow the Republic. In the end, Cicero had the conspirators executed without trial. In an era of increased surveillance, terrorist threats, and social disharmony, we now find ourselves faced with difficult questions as some liberties are eroded in the name of national security.

That's what I love most about history! It grants us context towards understanding modernity. Whenever I

study the fascinating lives of those who came before, I find myself learning more about who **we** are in relation to the passage of time. Sadly, many choose to ignore history. Few know of their heritage or care about how we even got here. The fall of the Roman Republic and the ushering of one-man-rule with the rise of Augustus is one of the most critical turning points in our shared history. This was the ultimate conclusion to a series of civil wars extending further back to the feud between Julius Caesar and Pompey Magnus; which itself may be attributed to the dictatorships of Lucius Sulla and Gaius Marius.

A relatively recent and disturbing trend in the western world is the alarming rise of populist authoritarianism. For whatever reason, be it rising costs, declining standards of living or capitalism failing to live up to its promise, many of us are turning to unsavory strongmen who infect the halls of government with diseased ideologies that are inherently antithetical to all that we aspire to. It can even be felt in my own home country – the United States of America – where a sizable segment of the population has become radicalized by a vile combination of conspiracy theories, scientific illiteracy, historical illiteracy, religious fundamentalism, billionaire-backed propaganda and anti-intellectualism; all serving to dumb down and polarize the American electorate.

We bore witness to this first-hand in the form of an attempted coup on January 6, 2021 – an act of treason in the name of a seditious demagogue with autocratic ambitions. This failed power grab blatantly demonstrated to the global community just how fragile our Republic has become. It also accentuates the crisis of trust in our democracy and a loss of cohesion in the wider culture. The echo-chambers of social media have only worsened the political climate; often being

the ideal platform to proliferate falsehoods which poison the nation's capacity for any meaningful progress; much to the benefit of patrician elites who often purchase our politicians like whores in a brothel. In a momentous leap backwards, fascist rhetoric, gun violence, and even book bannings are becoming something of a frightful norm. How long until an American Caesar imposes their own warped dystopia? Are we doomed to the same fate as the Romans? Can we look beyond the fault lines and restrengthen our withering union? America as a global hegemon will likely survive a little while longer. But what of our Republic? What of our democracy? That, I'm afraid, is a story by which only WE can author.

There were various factors which contributed to the much-debated fall of Rome. The most common attributors are plagues, constant civil wars, and the rampant invasions of barbarian tribes from Germania and the Asiatic Steppes. Some even postulate that Christianity may have played a role in its decline. The exact causes are still discussed by academics today. But there were also brief instances where Rome could have survived a little while longer than it did in our own timeline. Capable men such as Aurelian, Majorian, or the magister militum Stilicho, all served as the last great defenders of Roman civilization. But due to the follies of greed and short-sightedness, their efforts would ultimately be undone. None remained who were competent enough to steer the ship of state. The death bell rang on 476 CE when the Germanic King, Odoacer, sacked the city of Rome and deposed its final emperor, Romulus Augustulus. This would be the end of the Western empire.

The eastern half of the empire, often referred to as Byzantium, would persist for another thousand years well into the European Middle Ages. Sadly, on May 28, 1453, the

end had finally come as Mehmed II led the Ottoman Turks to siege the holy city of Constantinople. Once the towering Theodosian Walls succumbed to cannon fire, the radiant light of the Imperium Romanum was finally extinguished. This was a flame which began over 2,000 years ago when the mythical Romulus and Remus founded a small, insignificant village by the banks of the Tiber. By the time Christopher Columbus, reached the Americas in October of 1492, Rome had only been dead for just under 40 years.

To this very day, people still read Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*, Gaius Julius Caesar's *The Gallic Commentaries*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, and even Maurice's *Strategikon*. Much of our understanding of this period still stems from the literary works of contemporary writers such as Suetonius, Polybius, Tacitus and Livy. Modern archaeology grants us the ability to delve deeper into history and weave through the myths and imperial narratives that can obfuscate the truth.

But what captivates me the most is learning about how the average Roman lived. They fell in love, got married, had children, paid their taxes, launched businesses, prayed to their gods, voted for scummy politicians, got embroiled in legal court-room battles, and mourned their dead. They were just ordinary human beings like you and me. And at the risk of sounding overly sentimental, I would argue that my series of fantasy novels (Deorum Legions™) is my own personal love letter to them... Until next time! Gratias tibi!

The Owl Shogun (Age 28)
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Until we meet again! See you in **Book 3!**

