

ROME AND ITS MANY SEQUELS

THE GREATEST STORY
BY ZOHEB MASHIUR



The experiences of puberty strongly shape the adults we become. Let us talk about something that happened during the world's adolescence. Let us talk about Rome, which we can analogise as that one girl Europe had a really passionate, long-term relationship with and after it was over Europe spent centuries and centuries searching for her in other empires. The legacy of Rome is a complex story and in this article it will not be possible to do that complexity justice. However, this very trickiness is worth highlighting as it serves a powerful reminder of how much baggage the past leaves the future with.

Perhaps the single most important city on earth in terms of magnetism and world history is Jerusalem. I would argue Rome comes second. Losing first place to a city that is at the heart of the three largest faiths in human history only serves to confirm, rather than diminish, Rome's influence. A few quick facts to illustrate my point: Rome was founded in 753 BC and by the time it became an official empire in 27 BC it'd already been a kingdom and then a republic – all the while holding territory as distant as Britain. At its height the Roman Empire covered most of Europe except Scandinavia and the East, and stretched past the Mediterranean to include Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. It lasted until 476 AD. There have been civilisations with more longevity and sophistication in both technology and culture (China, China, China) but they did not hold sway over so many disparate cultures and peoples. Ancient Rome destroyed the Second Temple in Jerusalem and also crucified Christ. The world we live in is undoubtedly post-Roman.

How do you adjust to such a thing's ending? You don't, of course. For a start, it was never a clean end. The Roman Empire had been broken in half since 395 AD, with the Eastern Empire administered from Constantinople. After the fall of the West, this Eastern or Byzantine Empire succeeded to the mantle of sole

Roman Empire. For a while there would be no challengers to the title, and even in the Quran this Byzantine Empire is what is referred to as "Rum".

Constantinople's claim as "Second Rome" becomes disputed with the coming in the West of the Holy Roman Emperor. This was the title granted to the Frankish king Charlemagne by the Pope in 800 AD, and until 1806 the Holy Roman Empire was a political entity that

Catholicism was the principal faith and most cultures spoke Romance languages derived from Latin; a Holy Roman Empire with ties to the church in Rome could easily lay greater claim to the legacy of the Western Empire.

As muddy as these waters already were, all states that claimed to be the "Second Rome" eventually fell. The Byzantine Empire was the first to fall, conquered by the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II in 1453.

Eastern Roman Empire, the Europeans and the Catholic Church were not impressed. Mehmed II had plans to rectify this by marching on towards Rome itself, but these died with him in 1481. His descendants discontinued the whole Caesar business.

However, the idea of the "Third Rome" and a new line of Caesars found new soil in Russia. Despite never having been a part of the ancient empire, the prevalence of Eastern Orthodoxy in the population made it a palatable idea that a successor to Constantinople's legacy could be found. The title of "Tsar", derived from Caesar, was already in use by the Slavic monarchs, stemming from their Orthodox – and therefore Byzantine – influence. There were competitors for the prestige of being called "The Third Rome", particularly as Russia did not exist as a polity for some time. Eventually the rise to prominence of Moscow, coupled with its grand prince Ivan III's marriage into the family of the last Byzantine ruler, cemented its place as the locus for Russia's claim to the legacy of Rome. Significantly, Moscow, Rome and Constantinople were all built over seven hills.

The doctrine of the "Third Rome" did not necessarily impress other states but imbued the nascent Russia with a self-confidence, with its rulers seeing themselves as inheritors of a God-given duty to preserve the legacy of Rome and to protect the last bastion of the Orthodox Church free from Islamic rule. To be the "Third Rome" was to be the universal city, above all others, and to impose the Church and the peace over all lands. The days of Russian imperialism were at hand.

The Russian coat of arms even now bears the double-headed eagle of ancient Rome. The empire has not truly fallen. Not yet.

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changed shape and form from Frankish to Germanic, and drew its legitimacy from the Catholic Church in Rome. This is important because by this time the Byzantine Empire had switched to Greek Orthodoxy and spoke Greek as its primary language. The logical successors to Ancient Rome had few political, cultural or religious ties to the then-modern city of Rome. In Western Europe, Roman

Mehmed II intended to continue Constantinople's place as the successor to Rome, and styled himself as its new Caesar, "Kayser-i Rum". He legitimised his claim by getting the Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople to recognise it: which was easy enough to do as Mehmed II appointed someone to the post specifically to back him up. Despite this and holding the historical capital of the



The Byzantine Empire



The Russian Federation