

BACK ON TRACK

Gradually, the Romans rebuilt their city and began to win back the land they had lost. The other cities in the Latin League resented Rome's increasing power, and war broke out. In 338BC, Rome defeated the League and took control of Latium.

At the same time, Rome was involved in three wars against a nearby hill tribe called the Samnites. The Samnites won several spectacular victories against Rome, but they were eventually defeated - along with their allies the Gauls and the Etruscans. By 290BC, Rome controlled most of central and northern Italy.

The Gauls were fierce warriors, who fought with swords and spears.



This fresco shows two Samnite warriors wearing helmets decorated with leathers.

KEEPING CONTROL

The Romans could be very generous to people they conquered. Any city that surrendered quickly was offered an alliance, and its people were given some of the privileges of Roman citizens. But those who resisted were brutally killed or sold as slaves. These tactics helped the Romans keep their growing lands under control.

THE PYRRHIC WARS

In 282BC, Rome was drawn into a dispute between rival Greek cities in the south, and agreed to help defend the city of Thurii. But Tarentum - another Greek city nearby - was suspicious of Rome's motives, and appealed to a Greek king named Pyrrhus for help. In the war that followed, Pyrrhus defeated the Romans twice, but lost vast numbers of his own soldiers. He is supposed to have remarked grimly: "Another victory like that, and I'll be ruined."

Pyrrhus was eventually defeated in 275BC, and by 264BC the Romans dominated all of Italy. Rome was now one of the most powerful states in the Mediterranean.

This is a statue of King Pyrrhus. The phrase 'a Pyrrhic victory' is still used today when the cost of winning is too high.

