

The Civilization of Ancient Rome



Before
You
Read
This
Chapter

STORY LINES

- Romans were proud of their unique history, especially the legend that they had overthrown their kings. They clung to this story even when individual men came to wield kingly powers.
- Roman identity, religion, and politics were intimately bound up in the worship of ancestors, especially male ancestors. As a result, fathers (living and dead) wielded extraordinary power in early Rome.
- Roman women enjoyed more freedoms than the women of ancient Greece, but they were still subject to the authority of their male relatives.
- Paradoxically, the Romans celebrated their farming heritage even as they built a highly urbanized society. At the same time, they regarded Greek culture as both superior and dangerous.
- The Roman army had unprecedented strength and importance in this civilization, but the army's relationship to Roman politics and society changed drastically as Rome's empire grew.

CHRONOLOGY

753 B.C.E.	Legendary founding of Rome
c. 509 B.C.E.	Roman Republic established
c. 450 B.C.E.	Law of the Twelve Tables
287 B.C.E.	"Struggle of the Orders" ends
264–146 B.C.E.	Punic Wars
134–104 B.C.E.	Slave revolts in Sicily
133–122 B.C.E.	Reforms of the Gracchi
107–86 B.C.E.	Consulship of Marius
82–79 B.C.E.	Dictatorship of Sulla
73–71 B.C.E.	Rebellion of Spartacus
52–48 B.C.E.	Struggle of Pompey and Caesar
48–44 B.C.E.	Dictatorship of Caesar
44–30 B.C.E.	Rivalry of Octavian and Antony
27 B.C.E.–14 C.E.	Principate of the Emperor Augustus
27 B.C.E.–180 C.E.	Flowering of the <i>Pax Romana</i>
79 C.E.	Eruption of Mount Vesuvius destroys (and preserves) Pompeii
117 C.E.	Roman Empire reaches its greatest extent under Trajan

CORE OBJECTIVES

- **IDENTIFY** the factors that influenced the formation of the Roman Republic.
- **UNDERSTAND** the basic elements of Roman identity.
- **DEFINE** the classes of people who struggled for power in Rome and **EXPLAIN** their different objectives.
- **DESCRIBE** the impact of territorial expansion on Roman society.
- **TRACE** the events leading up to the establishment of the Principate.

Could anyone be so indifferent or slow-witted as not to care how, and under what system of government, the Romans managed to bring nearly the whole inhabited world under their rule? Can anything be more important than understanding this? So the Greek soldier Polybius (c. 203–120 B.C.E.) addresses Greek readers in a history celebrating the achievements of the Roman Republic. Polybius had witnessed some of these firsthand: on the battlefield, in Rome itself as a hostage and guest, and on a visit to newly conquered Carthage. What better testament could there be to the success of a small Italian city than the admiration of a cultivated Greek aristocrat who, having been subjected to Roman authority, wholeheartedly embraced it? None, unless we cite the equally enthusiastic endorsement of the same Jews who had rebelled against Greek influence in 164 B.C.E. They, too, could not say enough in praise of the Romans, and they willingly placed themselves under Roman protection:

Those whom they wish to help and to make kings, they make kings, and those whom they wish they depose; and they have been greatly exalted. Yet for all that, not one of

them has put on a crown or worn purple as a mark of pride, but they have built for themselves a senate chamber and every day three hundred and twenty senators constantly deliberate concerning the people, to govern them well. (1 Maccabees 8:12–15)

The only people who could say more in praise of Rome were the Romans themselves. To them, the enormous success of their empire meant that they were divinely chosen to colonize the world. This was the message conveyed by the poet Virgil (70–19 B.C.E.), commissioned by the Emperor Augustus to tell the story of Rome's rise to glory in a manner imitating the epics of Homer. In one key passage, the father of Aeneas, Virgil's epic hero, "foretells" the future and addresses posterity: "Remember, Roman, you whose power rules / all peoples, that these are your arts: plant peace, / make law, spare subjects, and put down the proud" (*Aeneid*, Book VI, lines 851–3).

While the Greeks struggled against the Persians and against each other, a new civilization emerged beyond the northern fringes of the Greek world, on the banks of the river Tiber in central Italy. By 300 B.C.E. Rome was the dominant power on the Italian peninsula. Two centuries later, it had conquered Greece itself. For the next three centuries after that—an unprecedented period of sustained expansion—its power steadily increased. In the first century of our era, it ruled the Hellenistic world as well as a vast region that Greek culture had never touched: western Europe. Eventually, Rome's empire united the entire Mediterranean and most of Asia Minor, while at the same time embracing provinces that are now parts of France, Spain, Portugal, Britain, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, and the Balkans. Rome thus built a historical arch that enabled Europe to share in a rich heritage reaching back to ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt. Without Rome, European culture as we know it would not exist, and neither would the political and legal institutions that formed the United States. To echo Polybius: "Can anything be more important than understanding this?"

THE TIME OF THE KINGS

Romans looked back uneasily on their early history, for this was the time when they were ruled by kings. It may have been necessary in those days: Romans had never been peaceful settlers, and their land did not yield an easy living. Although Italy had much more fertile land than Greece, its extensive coastline boasts only a few good harbors, and most of these are on the western side, away from the commercial hubs of Greece and the Near East. Nor does the length of this coastline offer secure natural defenses. So the Romans

were a warlike people from the first, continually forced to defend their own conquests against other invaders.

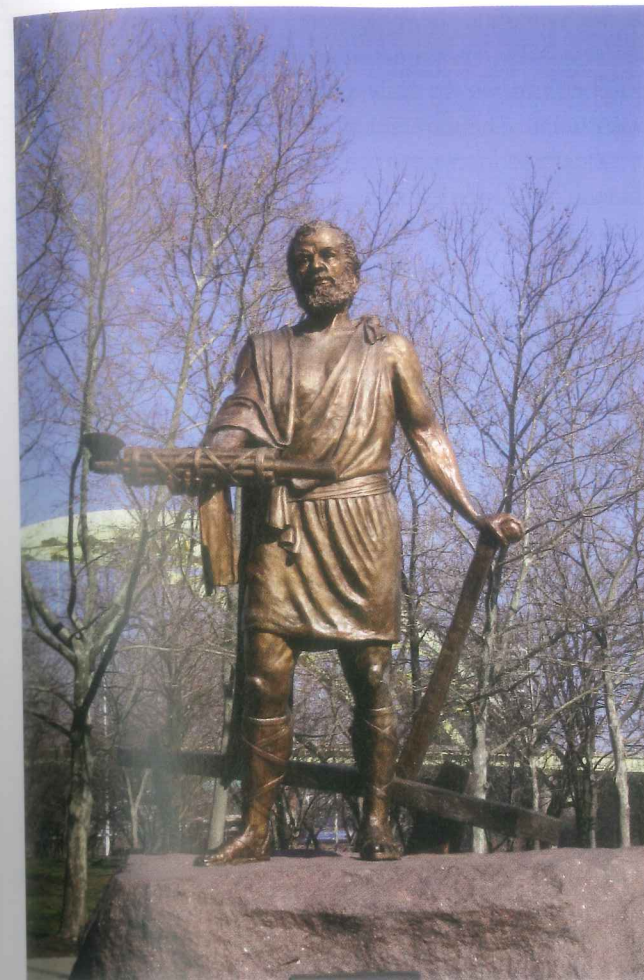
Early Influences

When the Romans arrived in Italy, the dominant inhabitants of the peninsula were the Etruscans, a people who remain mysterious despite the rich archaeological record they left behind. This is because their language (not a branch of Indo-European) has never been fully deciphered, even though the Etruscans used an alphabet borrowed from the Greeks. By the sixth century B.C.E., the Etruscans had established a confederation of independent city-states in north-central Italy. They were skilled metalworkers, artists, and architects, from whom the Romans later took their knowledge of the arch and the vault, among much else, including the bloody sport of gladiatorial combat.

The two most important foundation myths told by the Romans were also derived from Etruscan tradition: the story of Aeneas's escape from Troy, which became the basis of Virgil's *Aeneid*, and also the story of the infant twins Romulus and Remus, abandoned at birth and then raised by a maternal wolf, afterward founding a fledgling city. Both legends would be mined by Rome's historians for their metaphorical significance, and further details would be added to increase their relevance for a changing audience. For example, the story of Aeneas's seduction and abandonment of Dido, queen of Carthage, reflected Rome's defeat of that powerful North African civilization.

In marked contrast to Greek society, Etruscan women enjoyed a very high status and played important roles in public life. Etruscan wives even ate meals with their husbands, another departure from both Greek and Roman custom. After death, devoted couples were buried together in the same mortuary vaults, and their tombstones and sarcophagi often emphasize mutual affection. Some of these practices certainly affected the Romans, whose women were less sequestered than their Greek counterparts. Yet Rome's women did not enjoy the same freedoms as Etruscan women until very late in Roman history, and by then such freedoms were condemned as signs of decadence (as will be discussed later in the chapter).

The Romans also borrowed ideas from the Greek settlers who had begun to colonize southern Italy and Sicily during the eighth century B.C.E. From them, Romans derived their alphabet, many of their religious beliefs, and much of their art. But the Romans downplayed Greek influence in their founding mythology, preferring to emphasize their alleged descent from the Trojans and also from an Italic people called the Sabines, from whom (according to legend) Romulus and his



CINCINNATUS THE STATESMAN-FARMER. This bronze statue of Cincinnatus is prominent in Cincinnati, Ohio, which was named after the Roman hero (and in honor of George Washington) in 1790. In his right hand he holds the *fasces*, symbolizing his powers as dictator. In his left, he grasps the handle of a plow. ■ *Why would this figure have fired the imagination of Americans after their War of Independence?*

men had forcibly abducted their wives. This was a practice Romans would continue, as the legions who planted new colonies intermarried with indigenous populations from the Persian Gulf to the lowlands of Scotland.

The Founding of Rome

The real founders of Rome were a tribe called the Latins, descendants of Indo-European-speaking peoples who crossed the Alps into Italy and settled on the banks of the Tiber by the tenth century B.C.E. This location was advantageous. Trading ships (but not large war fleets) could navigate the river as far as the city, yet no farther; Rome could thus serve as a

commercial port and was not threatened by attack from the sea. Rome also sat astride the first good ford across the Tiber, making it a major crossroads. Further, there were strategic advantages to the seven hills among which Rome was nestled. Eventually, its central marketplace—the *forum* or "open space"—would become the beating heart of the world's most populous and powerful city, with approximately a million people crowded into an area of five square miles.

At an early date, the Romans negotiated a series of agreements with their neighbors which were collectively known as the Latin Right: a trading pact called the *commercium*, provisions for intermarriage called the *connubium*, and the *migratio*, which allowed a Latin resident of one settlement to emigrate to another and, after a year's residence, to have the full rights of a citizen there. These privileges contrast strongly with the mutual suspicion that divided the cities of ancient Sumer or Greece. Indeed, the Romans' later willingness to extend the Latin Right far beyond their homeland of Latium was a key factor in the success of their empire.

According to their own legends, the Romans' early government mirrored the structure of Roman households, with a patriarchal king whose power was checked only by a council of elders, the Senate (from the Latin *senex*, "old man"). Seven kings, including Romulus, are said to have ruled in succession. The last, Tarquinius Superbus (Tarquin the Arrogant), is reputed to have been an Etruscan who paved the way for Rome's imperial expansion by dominating the agriculturally wealthy district of Campania to the south. But his power came at the price of Roman freedom and dignity, as was made clear when Tarquin's son allegedly raped a virtuous Roman wife, Lucretia, around 510 B.C.E. When she committed suicide to avoid dishonor, the Romans—led by Lucretia's kinsman, Lucius Junius Brutus—rose up in rebellion, overthrowing not only the Etruscan dynasty but rejecting the very idea of monarchy as a legitimate form of government. Henceforth, any claim to royal authority in Rome was considered anathema, and the very word "king" (*rex*) was a term of insult. The Brutus who would be instrumental in the assassination of Julius Caesar nearly five centuries later was a descendant of that same Brutus who had driven out the Tarquin kings—something he and his contemporaries never forgot.

THE TRIUMPH OF THE EARLY REPUBLIC

The story of Lucretia was both a patriotic myth and a potent statement of Roman attitudes toward female chastity and family honor. And it coincided with a radical change in Roman governance. This change was so radical, in fact,

that it did not match any of Aristotle's political categories (Chapter 4), but instead combined elements of them all. The Romans themselves didn't know what to call their political system: they spoke of it merely as *res publica*, "the public thing."

The Territorial Expansion of Rome

The early Roman Republic was marked by almost constant warfare aimed at stitching together a patchwork of valuable territories that could support Rome's growing population. Gradually, Romans came to control the valuable port of Ostia at the mouth of the Tiber, about twenty miles from their city. They also pushed northward into Etruscan territory, and southward to Naples, another good port. By 300 B.C.E., Rome had absorbed or allied itself with all of central Italy and began to look even farther south, to the wealthy Greek colonies of Sicily.

The Romans' rapid success is remarkable when compared to the patterns familiar to us from our study of classical Greece. What was the secret of it? For one thing, the Romans did not impose heavy burdens of taxation and tribute on the settlements they conquered. More often, they demanded only that they contribute soldiers to the Roman army. Rome also extended the Latin Right to many of these conquered territories, giving them a further stake in Rome's political and military expansion.

Rome thus gained for itself nearly inexhaustible reserves of fighting men. By the middle of the third century B.C.E., its army may have numbered as many as 300,000—a huge force even by modern standards. As we have seen, the Greeks had eventually turned to paid soldiering out of economic necessity, but they fought in smaller numbers; Xenophon's army was 10,000 and Alexander's 100,000. The Great King of Persia could claim to muster a million men, but these were private or tribal armies commanded by his satraps, not a standing army loyal to him.

The Romans also devoted themselves to the discipline of warfare in ways the Greeks (except for the Spartans) and the Persians did not. Although they originally used the phalanx formation, they quickly replaced it with smaller, more flexible divisions that could adjust to the hilly conditions of central Italy. While the major unit of the Roman army was always the legion (5,000 men), the combat unit was the *maniple* ("handful"), a group of 120 infantrymen who trained together and who often performed specialized tasks or used special weaponry. The Greek Polybius could not say enough in praise of this system, which made the army adaptable to climate, terrain, and new military techniques.

The republic's early history reinforced not only the military character of the Roman nation but its commitment to agriculture as the only proper peacetime employment for a Roman. The acquisition of new lands made it possible for citizens to maintain themselves as farmers. As a result, Romans developed an interest in commerce fairly late when compared with the Greeks or Phoenicians. And they would continue—even at the height of their empire—to valorize rural life over that of the city.

The paragon of Roman heroism in this era was Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus (519–c. 430 B.C.E.), a stout-hearted citizen-farmer who reluctantly accepted political office when Rome was threatened by attack. According to legend, he was found plowing his fields when a delegation of senators arrived to bring him to Rome, where he found that he had been named *dictator* ("decider"). This was a position of power to which the Romans elected one man during times of crisis that required decisive leadership. As legend has it, Cincinnatus dutifully performed this role, led Rome in wars with hostile neighbors—and then went back to his plow. If Lucretia was the Roman ideal of female fortitude, Cincinnatus was the paradigm of manly virtue. George Washington was frequently compared to him, to his own satisfaction.

The Constitution of the Early Republic

During this period of expansion, Rome's political system evolved accordingly. Initially, the overthrow of the monarchy had resulted in only moderate changes; instead of a king, the republic was headed by two elected officers called *consuls*. Although the consuls of the infant republic were supposedly chosen by all citizens, they were inevitably members of aristocratic families, known in Rome as *patricians* because they traced descent from a famous ancestor or *pater* ("father"). During his term of office, which lasted for one year, each consul exercised essentially the same power as a king: dealing justice, making law, and commanding the army. The only limit on power was the right of each consul to veto the actions of the other, which often led to stalemate or violent conflict. In times of grave emergency, such as that resulting in Cincinnatus's election, a dictator might be appointed for a term not longer than six months.

By the early fifth century, within a generation after the establishment of the republic, patrician dominance of the government began to be challenged by the *plebs* ("people"). This was the first stage in a centuries-long contest known

as the Struggle of the Orders. The plebeian classes made up nearly 98 percent of the Roman population. Some had grown wealthy through trade, but most were smallholding farmers, artisans, or the urban poor. Their causes for grievance were numerous. Although they were forced to serve in the army, they were nevertheless excluded from holding office. They were also the victims of discriminatory decisions in judicial trials, which were judged by patricians. They did not even know what their legal rights were, because Rome had as yet no established laws: there were only unwritten customs whose meaning was interpreted by the patricians to their own advantage. The plebeians were also, like the poorer citizens of Greek poleis, threatened with debt slavery.

These wrongs prompted a rebellion in the early fifth century B.C.E., when plebeians refused to join in the defense of Rome and instead seceded from the city, camping out on the Aventine hill (see the map of Rome on page 134). This general strike of military labor forced the patricians to allow the people to elect of their own officers, who were known as *tribunes* (tribal leaders). The job of each tribune was to protect his constituents from patrician injustice. Moreover, the plebeians guaranteed the safety of these officers by vowing to kill any person who hindered the exercise of their powers.

The plebs' victory led to the codification of the Law of the Twelve Tables, issued around 450 B.C.E. and inscribed on wooden tablets (hence "tables"). Although it was really a perpetuation of ancient custom, the fact that the law was now *defined* made it a significant improvement. Plebeians were made eligible to hold elected offices and they gradually gained access to the Senate. A further victory came in 287 B.C.E., when they succeeded in passing a law that made decisions enacted in their own assembly binding on the Roman government—whether the Senate approved them or not. It was at this time that the phrase *Senatus Populusque Romanum* came into regular use, abbreviated *SPQR* and designating any decree or decision made by "the Roman Senate and People." Visitors to Rome will still find *SPQR* emblazoned on everything from public buildings to the manhole covers of Rome's sewers.

These reforms had several important consequences. Successful plebeians could now work their way into the upper reaches of Roman society, which loosened the hold of patrician families. At the same time, laws prevented senators from engaging directly in commerce. This restriction had the effect of creating a new social order, that of the equestrians ("horsemen" or knights): men whose wealth made it possible for them to own and equip warhorses, and thus to provide Rome's cavalry. But the equestrians and the senators were never wholly distinct. Often, some members of

a wealthy family would underwrite the political careers of their brothers and cousins. Those families who managed to win election by such means, generation after generation, became increasingly influential. Meanwhile, patricians who chose politics over wealth became impoverished and resentful. By the first century B.C.E., many were tempted to pursue their political agendas by styling themselves champions of the people (as will be discussed later in the chapter).

Later Roman patriots would regard this as a golden age of shared government, but Rome was never a democracy. A republic differs from a monarchy only because power is exercised by officers whose offices are not (at least in theory) hereditary. It is essentially a system for reserving power to an oligarchy or privileged group. The constitution that emerged in these key centuries therefore broadened and stabilized oligarchy by the balance it struck between competing institutions: the assembly, the Senate, and executive officeholders. Thanks to this distribution of powers, no single individual or clique could become overwhelmingly strong; but neither could direct expressions of the popular will affect Roman policy.

For the Greek historian Polybius, this was an ideal system, combining elements of the monarchy (executive officeholders, the consuls), the aristocracy (the Senate), and the polity (the people's assembly and the tribunes). For the framers of the United States Constitution, it was a model for the three branches of a new government designed to *prevent* the vast majority of Americans from participating directly in politics, while allowing some citizens (white men with sufficient property) a say in choosing their representatives. Polybius prophesied that such a system would break the political cycle that had destroyed the Greek poleis—that it could last forever. He was wrong.

THE ESSENCE OF ROMAN IDENTITY

Romans accepted new things reluctantly but then preserved them fiercely. The prevailing force was the *mos maiorum*, "the custom of the ancestors" or even—to use a word derived from the Latin *mos*—"morality." This unwritten code was essential to Roman identity. It accounts for the remarkable coherence of Roman culture, religion, and law, all of which rested on ancestor worship. The Latin word *pietas* ("piety") meant reverence for family traditions and for one's fathers—living and dead. What made the legendary Aeneas "pious Aeneas" was his devotion to his father, Anchises, whom he carried to safety while Troy burned. Metaphorically, this meant that Aeneas was the carrier of

tradition, a man willing to shoulder the burdens of his ancestors and carry them forever.

This helps to explain why the Romans, in the ensuing centuries of their world domination, continued to identify so strongly with their homeland and its customs: to a Roman, “going native” in a foreign place was a terrible betrayal of the *mos maiorum*. It also explains the maxim of *patria potestas* (“fatherly power”) upheld by the Twelve Tables. A Roman father, no matter what his social class, had absolute authority within his household. If he was too poor to raise a child, he could expose it (leaving it to perish or to charity) or sell it into slavery. If his wife or child dishonored him, he could kill with impunity. We begin to understand why Lucretia killed herself: otherwise, her father could have killed her with his own hands.

These values set the Romans apart. The Greeks, for example, never condoned anything like *patria potestas*. When fathers kill their children in Greek mythology, they are inevitably killed in revenge by another family member or by the gods. And while pride in one’s ancestry is a universal human attribute, the Romans’ contemporaries were awed by their extreme devotion to these principles.

Although Roman religion resembled that of the Greeks in some respects, the Roman equation of religion with family meant that all gods were essentially family gods of the Roman state. The republic was like a giant, timeless household run by “elders” (senators) and “father figures” (patricians), some of whom traced their ancestry back to these gods: the mother of Aeneas was Venus (Aphrodite). Like a Roman household, then, the Roman state could flourish only if the ancestral gods lent their continuing and active support. Committees of priests therefore functioned as branches of the government; and in stark contrast to other ancient societies, these priests were not full-time professionals who formed a special caste, but prominent men who rotated in and out of office while serving as leaders of the Senate. Their dual roles made Roman religion even more integral to political life than it had been in Greece (Chapter 3), similar in some ways to the integration of religion and politics in ancient Mesopotamia (Chapter 1).

The all-important devotion to ancestors is further reflected in Roman naming practices, another custom that separated them from other cultures. Most free men in antiquity were known by a given name and their father’s name only: Alexander was “son of Philip.” A free-born Roman, by contrast, had at least two names. The name that mattered was the name of his earliest ancestor. Gaius Julius Caesar, to take a famous example, would have entered public life as Julius, a member of the family of the Julii, who claimed ancestry from Iulus, the son of Aeneas. His forename, Gaius

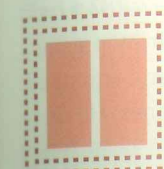


A ROMAN PATRICIAN OF THE FIRST CENTURY B.C.E. This man, who wears the toga of an aristocrat, displays his piety by holding the busts of his ancestors. Busts, like the funerary masks described by Polybius (see page 117), commemorated the dead and served as the focus for family worship in household shrines. ■ *How does the Roman attitude toward age and death differ from that of the Greeks (see the image on page 64)?* ■ *What do these differences suggest about the broader values of these two societies?*

Analyzing Primary Sources

Polybius Describes the Romans’ Worship of Their Ancestors

The Law of the Twelve Tables forbade excessive display at funerals, especially displays of wealth and grief on the part of women. Instead, funerals were supposed to be occasions for the display of family piety. In the following passage, the Greek historian Polybius—who had spent a formative fourteen years of his life in Rome—describes Roman burial customs and these rites’ relationship to the strength of republican ideals.



quote just one example to illustrate the pains taken by the Roman state to produce men who will endure anything to win a reputation for valor in their country. Whenever one of their celebrated men dies . . . his body is carried with every kind of honor into the Forum . . . sometimes in an upright position so as to be conspicuous, or else, more rarely, recumbent. The whole mass of the people stand round to watch, and his son, if he has one of adult age who can be present, or if not some other relative, then . . . delivers an address which recounts the virtues and successes achieved by the dead man during his lifetime. By these means the whole populace . . . are involved in the ceremony, so that when the facts of the dead man’s career are recalled . . . their sympathies are so deeply engaged that the loss

seems . . . to be a public one which affects the whole people. Then, after the burial of the body and the performance of the customary rites, they place the image of the dead man in the most conspicuous position in the house, where it is enclosed in a wooden shrine. This image consists of a mask which is fashioned with extraordinary fidelity . . . to represent the features of these dead men. On occasions when public sacrifices are offered, these masks are displayed and decorated with great care. And when any distinguished member of the family dies, the masks are taken to the funeral, and are worn by men who are considered to bear the closest resemblance to the original, both in height and their general appearance and bearing . . .

It would be hard to imagine a more impressive scene for a young man who aspires to win fame and practice virtue. For who could remain unmoved at the

sight of the images of all these men who have won renown in their time, now gathered together as if alive and breathing? What spectacle could be more glorious than this?

Source: Polybius, *The Rise of the Roman Empire*, trans. Ian Scott-Kilvert (New York: 1979), pp. 346–47.

Questions for Analysis

1. Why does Polybius place so high a premium on the Romans’ conduct of funerals? How can such rites be related to republican ideals?
2. Compare this analysis of Roman funerary rites to the image of a Roman patrician and his ancestors on page 116. How do they complement one another?

(GUY-us), was the most common name in Rome, the equivalent of “Joe” or “John,” and he would never be addressed by this name in public, except perhaps by very intimate friends. His third name, Caesar, was a nickname he acquired in the course of his career: “Hairy” (probably a joke). And because it was the most distinctive of his names, it became the name by which he was universally known. The same goes for Marcus Tullius Cicero (Cicero means “chick-pea”). The illustrious Cincinnatus was actually “Curly.”

What’s in a name? Everything, if you were a Roman man. And nothing, at least nothing of personal significance,

if you were a Roman woman. Lucretia’s name was not her own, but her father’s—or forefathers’: the feminine version of Lucretius. If she had a sister, they would both be called Lucretia, differentiated only as Major and Minor (“big/elder” and “little/younger”) Lucretia. If there were two more girls, they would be Tertia and Quarta (“Third” and “Fourth”) Lucretia, and so on. The only people in Rome who had personal names were slaves (who were named by their masters, like pets) or very low-born Romans and immigrants who had no lineage that mattered.

FROM REPUBLIC TO EMPIRE

For more than two centuries after the founding of the republic, warfare and agriculture remained the chief occupations of most Romans. The fact that Rome had no standard system of coinage until 289 B.C.E. suggests strongly that commerce was an insignificant component of its economy. Apparently, Romans didn't need portable wealth; when they weren't fighting, they wanted to be home on the farm, not gadding about the world. If they had money, they put it into real estate: land or slaves.

All of this changed rapidly when Romans began to look beyond Italy. In 265 B.C.E., they controlled most of the peninsula. A year later, they were already embroiled in a war overseas. For a home-loving people with ample resources, this seems paradoxical. Indeed, historians still argue about the motives for Roman expansion. Did Rome constantly extend its rule as a matter of policy, to feed a collective appetite for warfare and plunder? Or was it an accidental empire, built up in a series of reactions to changing pressures and threats—real and imagined? No definitive answer is possible, but it is in this crucial period that the Roman Republic began to transform Western civilizations, and to transform itself into the Roman Empire.

The Punic Wars, 264–146 B.C.E.

In 265 B.C.E. Roman territory extended to the tip of Italy's "boot," but there it ended. Just off its coast, the large islands of Corsica and Sardinia and the western half of Sicily were part of another state, much older and far wealthier. This was the great maritime empire of Carthage, which stretched along the northern coast of Africa from modern-day Tunisia through the Straits of Gibraltar and into modern Spain. Carthage itself had been founded around 800 B.C.E. as a Phoenician colony (see Chapter 2). It had the largest and most effective navy of its day, and it commanded the vast resources of commercial networks that reached as far north as Britain and deep into Egypt and the Near East. In every respect but one it was far superior to Rome. Yet that one factor was decisive: Carthage had no standing army. It relied on mercenaries bankrolled by the enormous profits of its merchants.

The epic struggle between Rome and Carthage lasted well over a century. It crystallized in three periods of concentrated warfare known as the Punic Wars (because the Romans called their enemies Poeni, "Phoenicians"). The first of these wars began in 264 B.C.E. Twenty-three years of bitter fighting were protracted because the

Carthaginians only needed to suffer one defeat in a land battle before resolving to engage the Romans solely at sea. There, they had the advantage—until the Romans built their own navy. Eventually, in 241 B.C.E., Carthage was forced to cede all of her Sicilian lands to Rome and to pay reparations.

Thereafter, the Romans were determined not to let Carthage revive its maritime power. So when Carthage attempted to expand its presence in Spain, Rome interpreted this as a threat and declared a new war that lasted for sixteen years: the Second Punic War. This time, Rome was thrown entirely off its guard by the brilliant exploits of the Carthaginian commander Hannibal (247–183 B.C.E.), who very nearly defeated the Romans at their own game. Daringly, Hannibal raised an army in Spain and equipped it with dozens of war elephants and siege engines. He then led this entire force across the Pyrenees into Gaul (now southern France), and then over the Alps into Italy. There, he harried Roman forces in their home territories for nearly sixteen years, from 218 to 202 B.C.E.

Hannibal was challenged more by the difficulty of supplying his army than by the Romans themselves. He also seems to have counted on winning the support of the Italian provinces that Rome had conquered, but Rome's generous treatment of its Latin allies kept them loyal. As a result, Rome could call on vast resources while Hannibal had only his exhausted army and no reserves forthcoming. Nevertheless, he won several amazing victories in Italy before retreating—technically undefeated—in 203. He also won the admiration of the Romans themselves, whose own histories frankly acknowledge his genius.

This phase of warfare ended only when a Roman general, Publius Cornelius Scipio (*SKIP-ee-oh*), took a leaf out of Hannibal's book. After campaigning successfully in Spain, he crossed into Africa and met Hannibal at Zama, near Carthage, in 201 B.C.E. His victory ended the Second Punic War and won him a new name, "Africanus," in honor of his conquest.

Carthage was now compelled to abandon all of its possessions except the city itself and its immediate hinterlands, and to pay an indemnity three times greater than the already crippling reparations demanded after the First Punic War. Yet Roman suspicion remained obsessive, and by the middle of the second century, some warmongers were urging a preemptive strike. Among the most vocal was an elderly patrician called Marcus Porcius Cato, who ended every speech he gave—no matter what the topic—with the words: "And furthermore, I strongly advise that Carthage be destroyed." This won him the nickname *Cato the Censor*, from the Latin verb "to advise."

In 149 B.C.E. the Senate seized on a minor pretext to demand that the Carthaginians abandon their city and settle at least ten miles from the sea. Of course, this absurd mandate amounted to a death sentence for a city dependent on maritime commerce, and it was refused—as the Romans knew it would be. The result was the Third Punic War and the siege of Carthage, which ended in 146 B.C.E. Those who survived the ensuing massacre were sold into slavery, and their once-magnificent city was razed to the ground. The legend that the Romans sowed the land with salt (to make it infertile) is apocryphal, but it vividly describes the successful eradication of an entire civilization. It would stand as a warning to Rome's other potential enemies.

Roman Control of the Hellenistic World

Rome's victories over Carthage led to the creation of new colonial provinces in Sicily, North Africa, and Hispania (Spain). This not only brought Rome great new wealth, it was also the beginning of the westward expansion that became Rome's defining influence on the history of Western civilizations.

At the same time, Rome's expansion brought it into conflict with eastern Mediterranean powers. During the Second Punic War, for example, Philip V of Macedonia had entered into an alliance with Carthage. Rome sent an army to stop him, and later foiled the plans of the Achaean League



THE EXPANSION OF ROME, 264–44 B.C.E. The rapid increase of Rome's territories opened up new opportunities and challenges.

- Looking at the phases of expansion on this map, in what directions did Roman dominion move? • Why was this the case? • What particular problems might have been created by the eventual extension of Roman rule into Gaul, well beyond the "Roman lake" of the Mediterranean?



Past and Present



Spectator Sports



Like the Romans' love for gladiatorial combat, Americans' love of football is inextricably tied to a sense of shared identity and fascination with violence and warfare. Although American football is not a bloodsport in a technical sense, part of its allure stems from the very great physical risks taken by its players, whose careers are often cut short by injury. Both pastimes form the core of far-reaching entertainment economies that would be dismantled by any attempts at reform: concessions, advertising, merchandising, and an array of other money-making activities.

Watch related author videos on the Student Site
www.norton.com/college/history/western-civilizationsBrief4

(see Chapter 4). This was when Polybius was sent to Rome as a hostage, and became a guest-friend in the family of Scipio Africanus, later witnessing the destruction of Carthage. Rome also thwarted similar efforts by the Seleucid monarch Antiochus III. In neither of these cases did Rome set out to conquer the eastern Mediterranean. By 146 B.C.E., however, both Greece and Macedonia had become Roman provinces, Seleucid Asia had lost most of its territories, and Ptolemaic Egypt had largely become a pawn of Roman interests.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF IMPERIALISM

Rome's seemingly inadvertent conquest of Greece and western Asia transformed the republic. New wealth poured in, increasing the inequalities within Roman society and

challenging traditional values. Small farmers left the land and swelled the impoverished urban population, unable to compete with huge plantations worked by gangs of slaves. Slaves also played an increasing role in Roman cities as artisans, merchants, and household servants.

Roman rule over the Hellenistic world had a particularly pervasive impact—so much so that many Romans considered themselves to have been “conquered” by Greece. Hitherto self-assured and self-satisfied, they now felt their own language and customs to be uncouth and barbaric compared to those of their cultivated colonial subjects.

Economic Change and Social Upheaval

Like all peoples of the ancient world, Romans took slavery for granted. But they were not prepared for the huge

increase in the number of slaves that resulted from these conquests. In 146 B.C.E., 55,000 Carthaginians were enslaved after the destruction of their city; not long before, 150,000 Greek prisoners of war had met the same fate. By the end of the second century B.C.E., there were a million slaves in Italy alone. Rome became one of the most slave-based economies in history, rivaling ancient Egypt or the antebellum American South.

The majority of Roman slaves worked as agricultural laborers on the vast (and growing) estates known as *latifundia*, created when Roman aristocrats absorbed the holdings of citizen-farmers who were now required to serve for years at a time on foreign campaigns and often found it impossible to maintain their farms. Consequently, they moved to the city—where there was no way for free men to sustain themselves, except through trade or violence. With abundant, cheap slaves to do all the rough work, moreover, there was no incentive for technological innovation. Meanwhile, expensive slaves did the specialized jobs: they were secretaries, bookkeepers, personal assistants, playwrights, musicians, sculptors, artists. There was little reason to employ paid labor at all, or even to train oneself in these arts, as the Greeks had. By the first century B.C.E., as a result, a third of Rome's one million inhabitants were receiving free grain from the state, partly to keep them alive and partly to keep them quiet. The poet Juvenal would later satirize the plebs as needing only “bread and circuses.”

The ready availability of slaves made Roman slavery a far more impersonal and brutal institution than it had been in other ancient civilizations. The standard policy of Roman slave owners was to get as much work out of their human possessions as possible, until they died of exhaustion or were “freed” in old age to fend for themselves. The same irascible Cato the Censor who had demanded the destruction of Carthage even wrote a “how-to” book on this subject. Of course, there were exceptions. Some domestic slaves were treated as trusted family members, and slave secretaries vital to the business of Roman governance and literature could even win fame or earn enough to buy their freedom. Some slave artisans were permitted to run their own businesses, keeping some of the profits.

But the general lot of slaves was horrendous. Some businessmen owned slaves whom they trained as gladiators to be mauled by wild animals or by other gladiators for the amusement of a paying public. The luxurious lifestyles of the wealthy also meant that dozens of slaves in every household were trapped in a cycle of menial tasks as doorkeepers, litter-bearers, couriers, valets, wet-nurses, and child-minders. In some great households, designated slaves had no other duties than to rub down the master after his bath or to keep track of the

mistress's social engagements. It was a life that debased both slave and owner, and undermined the values of the republic.

New Money, New Values

In the early republic, as we have seen, Roman men had nearly absolute powers over their individual households. During the second century B.C.E., however, two innovations greatly altered this pattern of patriarchal control. One was the introduction of new laws that allowed married women to control their own property: if a married woman died, her possessions would revert to her father or her father's heirs if she had no children of her own. Another was a law that allowed women to initiate divorce proceedings. These changes were intended to safeguard family wealth, but they also resulted in greater independence for women. A wife now had much more authority within the household because she contributed to its upkeep. If her husband did not show respect, she could leave him and deprive him of income.

Ironically, the growth of Rome's slave system also gave women greater freedom, for slaves took over the traditional work of child rearing, household maintenance, and the endless tasks of spinning and weaving. Women from well-to-do families now began to engage in a range of social, intellectual, and artistic activities. Indeed, women were among the chief consumers of the new Hellenistic fashions, commodities, and ideas available in Rome.

In earlier centuries, Romans had taken pride in the simplicity of their lives. Now, however, elite Romans began to indulge in creature comforts and to cultivate Hellenistic habits. Bilingualism became increasingly common, and Greek literature became the standard against which Roman authors measured themselves. For Latin was not yet a literary language. It was fine for politics or farming, but if one wanted to express lofty or beautiful thoughts one did so in Greek, which was far more flexible and sophisticated. Well-educated Greek slaves were therefore at a premium, to lend social cachet, to write letters, and to tutor Roman children.

But many Romans regarded these foreign influences with disgust. For them, the good old ways of paternal authority and stern discipline were giving way to effeminacy and soft living. Increasingly, hard-line conservatives passed laws to restore “family values” and regulate the conspicuous consumption of luxuries, especially by women. These measures were ineffectual. Rome was being irreversibly transformed into a complex cosmopolitan empire reliant on foreign slaves, foreign grain, and foreign luxuries, in which a vast gulf was widening between rich and poor, and where

traditional behavioral constraints were giving way to new freedoms for elite men and women.

Spirituality and Philosophy in the Late Republic

The religious practices of Rome changed markedly in this era. The most pronounced innovation was the spread of Eastern mystery cults, which satisfied a need for more emotionally intense spiritual experiences—especially for women, who were largely excluded from the rites of the patriarchal state religion. From Egypt came the cults of Isis and Osiris, while from Asia came the worship of the Great Mother, all emphasizing the power of female sexuality and reproduction. Despite the attractions of these new cults, Romans continued to honor their traditional gods alongside these new, exotic deities. Roman polytheism could absorb them all, so long as the ancestor gods of the household and the city were paid due reverence.

The Hellenistic philosophies of Epicureanism and Stoicism both found strong adherents in Rome (Chapter 4), but more congenial to Roman values was Stoicism. Its most influential proponent was Cicero (106–43 B.C.E.), famous in his day as an orator, statesman, and staunch defender of republican virtues. Cicero based his ethical teachings on the Stoic premise that tranquility of mind is the highest good: the ideal man is rational, indifferent to sorrow and pain. Yet Cicero diverged from the Stoics in his approval of the active, political life. He became an advocate for the revival of Roman tradition through service to the state. His elegant prose style also advanced the use of Latin as a language of eloquence and became the standard model for literary composition. Students learning Latin today still begin with Cicero.

“RESTORING THE REPUBLIC”: THE STRUGGLE FOR POWER

Politically, the century after the Third Punic War was one of turbulence. Bloody competitions among rival dictators and insurrections were common occurrences. Slave uprisings added to the general disorder. The most threatening revolt of all was led by Spartacus, a Thracian captive who was being trained as a gladiator. He and a band of 200 fellow slaves escaped from a gladiatorial training camp at Capua (*KAH-poo-ah*, near Naples), heavily armed, to the slopes of Mount Vesuvius, where their cause attracted a huge host of other fugitives. From 73 to 71 B.C.E. this desperate army defeated Roman forces of as many as 10,000

men before Spartacus himself was killed. The Senate, terrified of the precedent, ordered 6,000 of the captured slaves to be crucified along the length of the road from Capua to Rome—about 150 miles—as a warning to future insurgents. Crucifixion was a form of punishment reserved for slaves and non-Roman rebels, and it meant a slow, terrible, and public death from gradual suffocation and exposure.

The Reforming Efforts of the Gracchi

These waves of rebellion were mirrored by urban unrest in various forms, and the poorer classes were finding new champions among some progressive patricians. In 133 B.C.E., a grandson of Scipio Africanus, Tiberius Gracchus (*GRAH-cus*), was elected a tribune of the people. He proposed to alleviate social and economic stress by instituting major reforms, chiefly the redistribution of property. As we have noted, small farmers had been losing their lands to those whose new wealth allowed them to amass giant estates, the *latifundia*. To counter this, Tiberius Gracchus invoked old laws that had, under the early republic, limited the amount of land that could be held by a single person. His motives were not entirely populist. There was now a grave manpower shortage in the Roman army, which had been forced to expand its presence in the far reaches of the world and had left Rome itself prey to uprisings like that of Spartacus. Since a man had to meet certain property qualifications to serve in the Roman army, the available pool of citizen soldiers was contracting. So Tiberius Gracchus aimed to refresh the reserves by creating new citizens.

With the support of his brother Gaius, Tiberius Gracchus proposed a law that would restrict estates to a maximum of 300 acres per citizen, plus 150 acres for each child in his family, with the excess land to be divided among poor settlers. Not surprisingly, most senators stood to lose from this legislation, and so they engineered its veto by Gracchus's fellow tribunes. Gracchus retaliated, arguing that tribunes who opposed the people's interests were betraying their offices, and he announced plans to stand for reelection. A conservative faction in the Senate then alleged that Gracchus had his sights set on a dictatorship, and with this excuse they attacked and murdered him and his supporters on the day of the elections.

Ten years later, Gaius Gracchus renewed his older brother's struggle after being elected to the same office. Although a version of Tiberius's land reforms had finally been enacted, Gaius believed that the campaign had to go further. In 123 B.C.E. he enacted several laws for the benefit of the poor. He also imposed controls on provincial governors suspected

of exploiting their subjects for personal gain. Most controversially, Gaius proposed to extend full Roman citizenship to all the allied states of Italy, a move that would have kept the army well supplied with new soldiers, but which would alter the political landscape of Rome to the detriment of the existing elite. Accordingly, the Senate proclaimed Gaius Gracchus an outlaw. In the ensuing conflict, Gaius and about 3,000 of his followers became the victims of a purge.

Rivalry among Rome's Generals

Although the reforms of the Gracchi were ultimately unsuccessful, they exposed the weakness of the Senate and increased the power of the plebs, whose favor was now courted by a succession of ambitious men. Most were professional soldiers who controlled one or more legions of the Roman army and who traded on military victories abroad to win the confidence of the people. The first of these was Gaius Marius, who had fought a successful campaign against King Jugurtha of Numidia, a small kingdom in North Africa. In 107 B.C.E. Marius's popularity catapulted him to the consulship, despite the protests of the Senate's aristocracy, and he would be elected to that office six more times.

Marius set a powerful precedent by demonstrating how easily an army command could be an alternative path to political power. He also changed the course of Rome's history by reorganizing and expanding the army. Desperate for more men to fight in Africa and in Gaul, Marius abolished the property qualification that had hitherto limited military service; the potential pool of soldiers now included the urban poor and landless peasants. As a result, a career as a Roman legionnaire became an end in itself, and a soldier's loyalty was directed toward his commander—whose success would win rewards for his men—rather than to an abstract ideal of patriotism. This change also meant that factional fighting could lead to full-blown civil war, as legions loyal to one general were pitted against those of another.

This happened in Marius's own lifetime. The aristocratic general Lucius Cornelius Sulla (*SUH-la*) had fought with distinction in the so-called Social War of 91–88 B.C.E., a conflict between Rome and her Italian allies that resulted in the extension of Roman citizenship throughout the peninsula. Thereafter, Sulla seemed the likely person to lead Rome's army to war in western Asia. Marius, however, forced the Senate to deny Sulla's claim. Sulla's response was to rally the five victorious legions that had just fought under his command and, with a Roman army at his back, to march on Rome.

Strong taboos had long prevented any armed force from entering the city limits, but Sulla argued that his actions were in keeping with the *mos maiorum*, which Marius and the Senate had betrayed. He was then given the coveted command in Asia Minor, after which Marius again seized control of the city. When Marius died soon afterward, a conservative backlash led the aristocracy to appoint Sulla to the office of dictator—and not for the traditional six months. Instead, Sulla's term had no limits, and he used this time to exterminate his opponents. He packed the Senate with men loyal to himself and curtailed the authority of the peoples' tribunes. Then, after three years of rule, he retired to a life of luxury on his country estate.

Caesar's Triumph—and Downfall

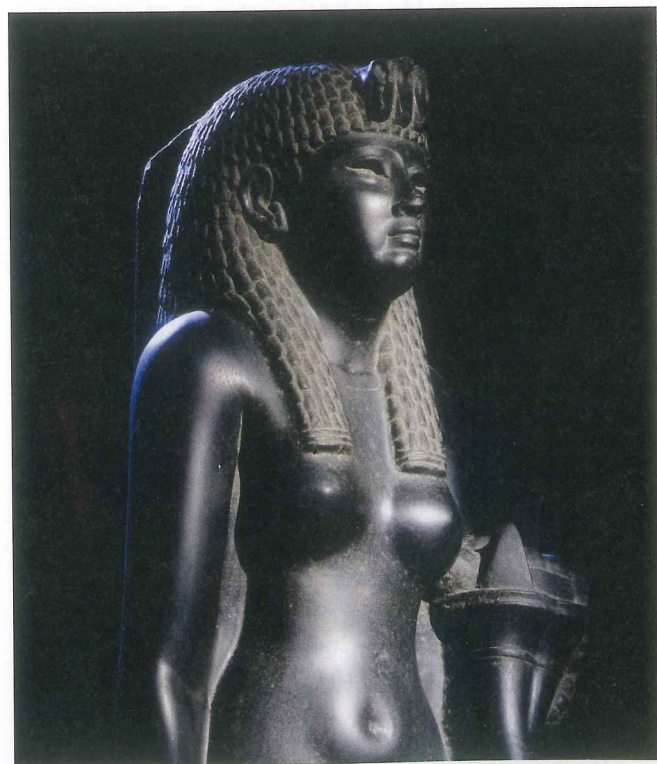
The effect of Sulla's dictatorship was to empower the aristocracy and weaken the power of the plebs. Soon, however, new leaders emerged to espouse the people's cause, once again using the army as their tool of influence. The most prominent of these military men were Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus (106–48 B.C.E.) and Gaius Julius Caesar (100–44 B.C.E.). Initially, they cooperated in a plot to “restore the republic” by forming an alliance with a third general, Marcus Junius Crassus, the man credited with finally defeating Spartacus. This alliance was known as a *triumvirate*, meaning “rule of three men,” but it soon dissolved into open rivalry. Pompey (as generations of English-speaking historians have called him) had won fame as the conqueror of Syria and Palestine, while Caesar had campaigned in Gaul, adding the territories of modern France, Belgium, and western Germany to the Roman Empire, and extending its northern border the length of the Rhine.

It had become accepted that the best general should be the leader of Rome, and the example of Sulla had made it possible for that leader to be a dictator for life, a king in all but name. But it was Pompey, not Caesar, who was actually in Rome and in a position to influence the Senate directly. So in the face of tremendous popular protest and even some opposition from the aristocracy, Pompey had himself elected sole consul. Essentially, this meant that he could act as dictator. Using this authority, he declared that Caesar, who was still stationed in Gaul, was an enemy of the republic, and that his ambition was to make himself king.

The result was a pervasive and deadly civil war. In 49 B.C.E., Caesar crossed the Rubicon River, the northern boundary of Rome's Italian territories, thereby signalling his intention to take Rome by force. Pompey fled to the eastern Mediterranean in the hope of gathering an army large enough to confront Caesar's legions. Caesar pursued him,

and in 48 B.C.E. the two Roman armies met at Pharsalus in Greece. Pompey was defeated and fled to Alexandria, where he was murdered by a Roman officer attached to the court of Ptolemy XIII (62/61–47? B.C.E.). Ptolemy was then about fourteen years old and engaged in a civil war of his own—with his elder sister and co-ruler, Cleopatra VII (69–30 B.C.E.). Caesar threw his support on the side of the twenty-one-year old queen. The two must have become lovers soon after their first meeting, because their son Caesarion (“Little Ceasar”) was born nine months later.

After that, Caesar returned to Rome in triumph—literally. A *triumph* was a spectacular honor awarded to a victorious Roman general by the Senate, and was the only legal occasion on which (unarmed) soldiers were allowed to parade in the streets of Rome. Triumphs had been celebrated since the earliest days of the republic and featured columns of prisoners and spoils of war, chained captives (often enemy kings) led in humiliation to their public executions, floats commemorating the achievements of the triumphant man, and thousands of cheering Romans who received extra rations of grain and gathered up coins thrown by the handful. Through it all, Caesar would have ridden in a chariot with a golden wreath held above his head, while a slave stood behind him, murmuring in his ear the words *Memento mori*: “Remember: you will die.” A triumph was so glorious and—under the republic—so rarely granted that those thus honored might forget their own mortality.



Caesar's power seemed absolute. In 46 B.C.E. he was named dictator for ten years; two years later, this was changed to a lifetime appointment. In addition, he assumed nearly every other title that could augment his power. He even governed the reckoning of time: in imitation of the Egyptian calendar, he revised the Roman calendar so as to make a 365-day year with an extra day added every fourth year. This Julian calendar (as adjusted by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582) is still observed, and the seventh month is still named after Julius.

Caesar also took important steps toward eliminating the distinction between Italians and provincials within the empire by conferring citizenship on the residents of Hispania (Spain) and the newly annexed provinces in Gaul. By settling many of his army veterans in these lands, moreover, he furthered colonization. By incorporating Gaul into the Roman world he brought in a much-needed source of food and natural resources and created a new outlet for the spread of Roman influence.

In the eyes of many contemporaries, however, Caesar's achievements were further signs that he intended to make himself king: a hateful thought to those who still glorified the early days of the republic. Indeed, it was around a descendant of Lucretia's avenger, Brutus, that a faction of the Senate crystallized into conspiracy. On the Ides of March in 44 B.C.E.—the midpoint of the month, according to his own calendar—Caesar was attacked on the floor of the



CLEOPATRA VII AS EGYPTIAN PHARAOH AND HELLENISTIC RULER. Like her ancestor, Ptolemy I, Cleopatra represented herself as both enlightened Greek monarch and as pharaoh. It was perhaps due to her example that Julius Caesar was the first Roman leader to issue coins impressed with his own image. ■ *How does Cleopatra's self-representation compare to that of Hatshepsut (see Chapter 2) or Ptolemy (Chapter 4)?*

Senate's chamber and stabbed to death by a group of men. His body would later be autopsied, the first such examination in recorded history. It was found that he had received 23 wounds.

THE PRINCIPATE AND THE PAX ROMANA, 27 B.C.E.–180 C.E.

In his will, Caesar had adopted his grandnephew Gaius Octavius (or Octavian, 63 B.C.E.–14 C.E.), then a young man of eighteen. On learning of Caesar's death, Octavian hastened to claim his inheritance and to avenge his slain “father,” whose name he took: he was now Gaius Julius Caesar the younger. But he soon found that he had rivals among those supporters of Caesar who had not been implicated in the plot to kill him, most notably Marcus Antonius (or Mark Antony, 83–30 B.C.E.), who had served under Caesar in Gaul and was determined to make himself governor of that whole province.

Octavian engineered his own election to the office of consul (though he was far too young for this honor) and used his powers to have Caesar's assassins declared outlaws. He then pursued Antony to Gaul, at the head of an army. Antony's forces were overwhelmed, and in 43 B.C.E. he and Octavian reconciled and formed an alliance, bringing in a third man, a senator called Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, to make up a second triumvirate. They then set about crushing the faction responsible for Caesar's murder.

Their methods were brutal: prominent conspirators were hunted down and their property confiscated. The most notable of these victims was Cicero. Meanwhile, the masterminds behind the assassination, Brutus and Gaius Cassius, fled Rome and raised an army of legions from Greece and western Asia. But they were defeated by the united forces of Antony and Octavian on a battlefield near the Macedonian town of Philippi (founded by Alexander's father) in 42 B.C.E. Both Brutus and Cassius committed suicide.

With their mutual enemies destroyed, tensions mounted between Antony and Octavian. Antony went to Egypt and made an alliance with Cleopatra. Octavian, meanwhile, reestablished himself in Rome, where he skillfully portrayed Antony as having been seduced and emasculated by the female pharaoh. For ten years, Antony played the king in Egypt, fathering three of Cleopatra's children and making big plans for annexing Rome's eastern provinces. Eventually, Octavian had him declared a traitor while the Senate declared war on Cleopatra.



OCTAVIAN. Caesar's adopted heir was later granted the title “Augustus” by the Senate, and was also known as *princeps*, “first man.” Eventually, he would be worshiped as a god in Rome's provinces, and idealized statues like this one would be erected in temples and public places throughout the empire.

In 31 B.C.E. Octavian's superior forces defeated those of Antony and Cleopatra in the naval battle of Actium, off the coast of Greece. Soon afterward, both Antony and Cleopatra committed suicide. Their children were taken back to Rome, and although their lives were spared they were paraded through the streets as captives. This marked the end of Egypt's independence: Cleopatra had been its last pharaoh. After more than three thousand years of

Analyzing Primary Sources

Antony and Cleopatra

In his *Parallel Lives*, the Greek intellectual Plutarch (c. 46–120 c.e.) paired the biographies of famous Greeks with those of famous Romans, always to the disadvantage of the latter; for example, Julius Caesar suffers in comparison to Alexander the Great, as Romulus does when set up against Theseus. The following excerpt is from Plutarch's *Life of Mark Antony*, in which the Hellenistic ruler of Egypt, Cleopatra, plays a starring role.

Cesar and Pompey knew Cleopatra when she was still a girl, and ignorant of the world, but it was a different matter in the case of Antony, because she was ready to meet him when she had reached the time of life when women are most beautiful and have full understanding. So she prepared for him many gifts and money and adornment, of a magnitude appropriate to her great wealth and prosperous kingdom, but she put most of her hopes in her own magical arts and charms. . . . For (as they say), it was not because her beauty in itself was so striking that it stunned the onlooker, but the inescapable impression produced by daily contact with her: the attractiveness in the persuasiveness of her talk, and the character that surrounded her conversation was stimulating. It was a pleasure to hear the sound of her voice, and she tuned her tongue like a many-stringed instrument expertly to whatever language she chose, and only used interpreters to talk to a few

foreigners. . . . She is said to have learned the languages of many peoples, although her predecessors on the throne did not bother to learn Egyptian, and some had even forgotten how to speak the Macedonian dialect.

She took such a hold over Antony that, while his wife Fulvia was carrying on the war in Rome against Octavian on his behalf, and the Parthian army . . . was about to invade Syria, Antony was carried off by Cleopatra to Alexandria, and amused himself there with the pastimes of a boy. . . . Whether Antony was in a serious or a playful mood, she could always produce some new pleasure or charm, and she kept watch on him by night and day and never let him out of her sight. She played dice with him and hunted with him and watched him exercising with his weapons and she roamed around and wandered about with him at night when he stood at people's doors and windows and made fun of people inside, dressed in a slave-woman's outfit; for he also attempted to dress up like a slave. He returned from these

expeditions having been mocked in return, and often beaten, although most people suspected who he was. But the Alexandrians got pleasure from his irreverence . . . enjoying his humor and saying that he showed his tragic face to the Romans and his comic one to them.

Source: Plutarch, *Life of Marcus Antonius*, cc. 25–29, excerpted in *Women's Life in Greece & Rome: A Sourcebook in Translation*, ed. Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant (Baltimore, MD: 1992), pp. 147–49.

Questions for Analysis

1. How do Cleopatra's behavior and accomplishments, in Plutarch's description of her, compare to those of Roman women?
2. Given what you have learned about the values of the Roman Republic, how would a Roman reader respond to this description of Antony's behavior under the influence of the Egyptian queen? What do you think were Plutarch's motives in portraying him in this light?

self-rule, Egypt was now another province in Rome's empire. Octavian's power was consolidated.

The Principate of Augustus

The victory at Actium ushered in a new period of Roman history. The new Gaius Julius Caesar was now the only

man left standing, with no rivals for power. For the first time in nearly a century, Rome was not embroiled in civil war. But it was no longer a republic, even though Octavian maintained the fiction that he was governing as a mere citizen. For four years he ruled as sole consul, until he accepted the titles of *imperator* (emperor) and *augustus*. Although these honorifics had been in use under the republic—*imperator* meant “commander” and *augustus*

meant “worthy of honor”—they now became attached to the person of the sole ruler. Rome had long been an empire, but it was only now that it had a single emperor. To avoid confusion, historians therefore refer to this phase of Rome's history as the Principate, from the title Augustus himself preferred: *princeps*, or “first man.”

Because Augustus was determined not to be regarded as a tyrant or (worse) a king, he left most of Rome's republican institutions in place—but emptied them of their power. In theory, the emperor served at the will of “the Roman Senate and People.” In practice, though, he controlled the army, which meant that he also controlled the workings of government. Fortunately, Augustus was an able ruler. He introduced a range of public services, including a police force and fire brigade; he reorganized the army; and he allowed cities and provinces more substantial rights of self-government than they had enjoyed before. He instituted a new system of coinage throughout the empire, and he abolished the old, corrupt system of taxation, whereby tax collectors were compensated by being allowed to keep a portion of what they collected. Instead, Augustus appointed his own representatives, paid them regular salaries, and kept them under strict supervision. He also conducted a census of the empire's population, and it was during one of these “enrollments” that the birth of Jesus occurred, according to the gospel of Luke (see Chapter 6). Augustus also established new colonies in the provinces, encouraging the emigration of Rome's urban and rural poor, thereby removing a major source of social tension and promoting the integration of the Roman heartland with its far-flung hinterland.

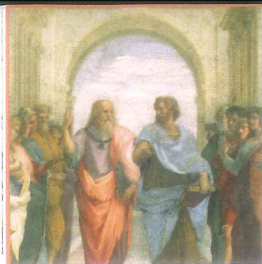
Although his rule had definitively ended the republic, Augustus represented himself as a stern defender of the *mos maiorum* and traditional Roman virtues. He rebuilt many of the city's ancient temples and prohibited the worship of foreign gods. In an attempt to increase the birthrate of Rome's citizens, he penalized men who failed to marry, required widows to remarry within two years of their husbands' deaths, and rewarded women who gave birth to more than two children. He also introduced laws punishing adultery and making divorces more difficult to obtain. To hammer the message home, Augustan

propaganda portrayed the imperial family as a model of domestic virtue and propriety, despite the emperor's own notorious extramarital affairs and the well-known fact that the sexual promiscuity of his daughter Julia finally forced Augustus to have her exiled.

More land was gained for Rome in the lifetime of Augustus than in that of any other ruler. His generals advanced into central Europe, conquering the modern-day territories of Switzerland, Austria, and Bulgaria. Only in Germania did Roman troops meet defeat, when three legions were slaughtered in 9 c.e., a setback that convinced Augustus to hold the Roman borders at the Rhine and Danube rivers. Subsequently, though, the emperor Claudius would begin the conquest of Britain in 43 c.e., while the Emperor Trajan (r. 98–117 c.e.) would push beyond the Danube to add Dacia (now Romania) to the empire. Trajan also conquered territories in the heartland of Mesopotamia, but in so doing aroused the enmity of the Parthians, who now ruled in Persia. His successor, Hadrian (r. 117–138 c.e.), accordingly halted Rome's expansion and embarked on a defensive policy epitomized by the construction of Hadrian's Wall in northern Britain. The empire had now reached its greatest extent; in the third century, as we shall see (Chapter 6), the tide would turn and these limits would recede.



HADRIAN'S WALL. Stretching 73.5 miles across northern England, this fortification (begun in 122 c.e.) marked the frontier of Britain as established by the emperor Hadrian. (A later wall, built farther north by Antoninus Pius in 142, was quickly abandoned.) Long stretches of the wall still exist, as do many of the forts built along it. The tree in this photograph stands on the site of a “mile castle,” one of the smaller watchtowers built at intervals of a Roman mile and garrisoned by sentries.



Competing Viewpoints

Two Views of Augustus's Rule

Augustus Speaks for Himself

The emperor Augustus was a master propagandist with an unrivaled capacity for presenting his own actions in the best possible light. This list of his own deeds was written by Augustus himself and was displayed on two bronze pillars set up in the Roman forum.

Below is a copy of the accomplishments of the deified Augustus by which he brought the whole world under the empire of the Roman people, and of the moneys expended by him on the state and the Roman people. . . .

1. At the age of nineteen, on my own initiative and at my own expense, I raised an army by means of which I liberated the republic, which was oppressed by the tyranny of a faction.
2. Those who assassinated my father I drove into exile, avenging their crime by due process of law.
3. I waged many wars throughout the whole world by land and by sea, both civil and foreign. . . .
5. The dictatorship offered to me . . . by the people and by the Senate . . . I refused to accept. . . . The consulship, too, which was offered to me . . . as an annual office for life, I refused to accept.

6. Though the Roman Senate and people together agreed that I should be elected sole guardian of the laws and morals with supreme authority, I refused to accept any office offered me which was contrary to the traditions of our ancestors.

7. I have been ranking senator for forty years. . . . I have been *pontifex maximus*, augur, member of the college of fifteen for performing sacrifices, member of the college of seven for conducting religious banquets, member of the Arval Brotherhood, one of the *Titii sodales*, and a *fetial* [all priestly offices].

9. The Senate decreed that vows for my health should be offered up every fifth year by the consuls and priests. . . . The whole citizen body, with one accord, . . . prayed continuously for my health at all the shrines.

17. Four times I came to the assistance of the treasury with my own money . . . providing bonuses for soldiers who

had completed twenty or more years of service.

20. I repaired the Capitol and the theater of Pompey with enormous expenditures on both works, without having my name inscribed on them. I repaired . . . the aqueducts which were falling into ruin in many places . . . I repaired eighty-two temples. . . . I reconstructed the Flaminian Way. . . .

34. Having attained supreme power by universal consent, I transferred the state from my own power to the control of the Roman Senate and people. . . . After that time I excelled all in authority, but I possessed no more power than the others who were my colleagues in each magistracy.

35. At the time I wrote this document I was in my seventy-sixth year.

Source: "Res Gestae Divi Augusti," in *Roman Civilization, Sourcebook II: The Empire*, ed. Naphtali Lewis and Meyer Reinhold (New York: 1966), pp. 9–19.

When Octavian died in 14 C.E. he was not only Caesar, Emperor, and Augustus; he was *pontifex maximus* (high priest) and "father of the fatherland" (*pater patriae*). He was even deified by the Senate. These titles would be passed on to his successors, as would the system of government

he had devised. And even those who mourned the passing of the republic and loathed these displays of imperial *hubris* had to admit that the system worked. Rome enjoyed nearly two centuries of peace, prosperity, and stability because of it. For the true test of any political institution



The Historian Tacitus Evaluates Augustus's Reign

Writing in the first decades of the second century C.E., the senatorial historian Tacitus (c. 56–117) began his chronicle of imperial rule, the *Annals*, with the death of Augustus a century earlier.

Intelligent people praised or criticized Augustus in varying terms. One opinion was as follows. Filial duty and a national emergency, in which there was no place for law-abiding conduct, had driven him to civil war—and this can be neither initiated nor maintained by decent methods. He had made many concessions to Antony and to Lepidus for the sake of vengeance on his father's murderers. When Lepidus grew old and lazy, and Antony's self-indulgence got the better of him, the only possible cure for the distracted country had been government by one man. However, Augustus had put the State in order not by making himself king or dictator but by creating the Principate. The empire's frontiers were on the ocean, or on distant rivers. Armies, provinces, fleets, the whole system was interrelated. Roman citizens were protected by the law. Provincials were decently treated. Rome itself had been lavishly beautified. Force had been sparingly used—merely to preserve peace for the majority.

The opposite view went like this. Filial duty and national crisis had been merely pretexts. In actual fact, the motive of Octavian, the future Augustus, was lust for power. Inspired by that, he

had mobilized ex-army settlers by gifts of money, raised an army—while he was only a half-grown boy without any official status—won over a consul's brigade by bribery, pretended to support Sextus Pompeius [the son of Pompey], and by senatorial decree usurped the status and rank of a praetor. Soon both consuls . . . had met their deaths—by enemy action; or perhaps in the one case by the deliberate poisoning of his wound, and in the other at the hand of his own troops, instigated by Octavian. In any case, it was he who took over both their armies. Then he had forced the reluctant Senate to make him consul. But the forces given him to deal with Antony he used against the State. His judicial murders and land distributions were distasteful even to those who carried them out. True, Cassius and Brutus died because he had inherited a feud against them; nevertheless, personal enmities ought to be sacrificed to the public interest. Next he had cheated Sextus Pompeius by a spurious peace treaty, Lepidus by spurious friendship. Then Antony, enticed by treaties and his marriage with Octavian's sister, had paid the penalty of that delusive relationship with his life. After that, there had certainly been peace, but it was a bloodstained peace. . . . And gossip did

not spare his personal affairs—how he had abducted [Livia] the wife of Tiberius Claudius Nero, and asked the priests the farcical question whether it was in order for her to marry while pregnant. Then there was the debauchery of his friend Publius Vedius Pollio. But Livia was a real catastrophe, to the nation, as a mother and to the house of the Caesars as a stepmother.

Source: Tacitus, *Annals* 1.9–10. Based on Tacitus: *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, trans. Michael Grant (New York: 1989), pp. 37–39.

Questions for Analysis

1. How does Augustus organize his list, and why? What does he leave out and what does he choose to emphasize?
2. Tacitus presents two contrasting views of Augustus's motives. Which does he himself seem to believe? How does his account complement or undermine that of Augustus himself?
3. Could you write a new account of Augustus's life making use of both sources? How would you strike a balance between them? What would your own conclusion be?

is its capacity to survive incompetent officeholders. Aside from one brief period of civil war in 68 C.E., the transition of power between emperors was generally peaceful and the growing imperial bureaucracy could manage affairs competently even when individual emperors proved vicious and

ineffectual, as did Caligula (r. 37–41 C.E.). Nevertheless, the fact that Rome had become an autocratic state became harder and harder to conceal.

The height of the Augustan system is generally considered to be the era between 96 and 180 C.E., often

known as the reign of the “Five Good Emperors”: Nerva (r. 96–98 C.E.), Trajan (r. 98–117 C.E.), Hadrian (r. 117–138 C.E.), Antoninus Pius (r. 138–161 C.E.), and Marcus Aurelius (r. 161–180 C.E.). All were capable politicians, and since none but the last had a son that survived him, each adopted a worthy successor—a policy that avoided the messy family dysfunctions that absorbed Augustus and his immediate heirs. They also benefited from the fact that Rome had few external enemies left. The Mediterranean was under the control of a single power for the first time in history. On land, Roman officials ruled from Britain to Persia. Now was the *Pax Romana*, the time of Roman Peace.

MAKING THE WORLD ROMAN

Occasionally, the Roman Peace was broken. In Britannia, Roman legions had to put down a rebellion led by the Celtic warrior queen Boudica (*boh-DI-kah*; d. 60/61 C.E.), a war that ended in a massacre of the defiant tribes. Another rebellion was violently quashed in Judea, the most restive of all Roman provinces, leading to the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem in 70 C.E. In 135 C.E., a second rebellion



SPOILS FROM JERUSALEM. A bas-relief inside the triumphal Arch of Titus in the Roman forum shows plundered treasures from the Temple at Jerusalem, including the Menorah, being carried in triumph through Rome.

completed the destruction of the city. Although Jerusalem was later refounded by Hadrian as Aelia Capitolina, a colony for veterans of Rome’s army, Jews were forbidden to settle there.

Such rebellions were not the norm, however. Although the Roman Empire had been gradually achieved by conquest, it was not maintained by force. Instead, Rome controlled its territories by offering incentives to assimilation. Local elites were encouraged to adopt Roman modes of behavior and dress in order to gain entrance to political office. Local gods became Roman gods and were adopted into the Roman pantheon. Cities were constructed on a set model of urban planning, and the amenities of urban life were introduced: baths, temples, amphitheaters, aqueducts, and paved roads (see *Interpreting Visual Evidence* on page 134). Rights of citizenship were extended, and able provincials could rise far in the imperial government. Some, like the emperors Trajan and Hadrian—both raised in Hispania—came to control it. Meanwhile, tens of thousands of army veterans were settled in the provinces, marrying local women and putting down local roots. It was common for soldiers born in Syria to end their days peacefully in northern Gaul. In Camulodunum (now Colchester, England), the gravestone of a legionnaire called Longinus

Analyzing Primary Sources

Rome’s Party Girls

The Satires of the poet Juvenal circulated around the year 100 C.E. and attacked everything from the general erosion of public morality to the effete tastes of the elite. Some of his most pointed criticism was directed at contemporary women.

What conscience has Venus, when she is drunk? Our inebriated beauties can’t tell head from tail at those midnight oyster suppers when the best wine’s laced with perfume, and tossed down neat from a foaming conch-shell, while the dizzy ceiling spins round, and the tables dance, and each light shows double. Why, you may ask yourself, does the notorious Maura sniff at the air in that knowing, derisive way as she and her dear friend Tullia pass by the ancient altar of Chastity? And what is Tullia whispering to her? Here, at night, they stagger out of their litters and relieve themselves, pissing in long hard bursts

all over the goddess’s statue. Then, while the Moon looks down on their motions, they take turns to ride each other, and finally go home. So you, next morning, on your way to some great house, will splash through your wife’s piddle. Notorious, too, are the ritual mysteries of the Good Goddess, when flute-music stirs the loins, and frenzied women, devotees of Priapus, sweep along in procession, howling, tossing their hair, wine-flown, horn-crazy, burning with the desire to get themselves laid. . . . So the ladies, with a display of talent to match their birth, win all the prizes. No make-believe here, no pretense, each act is performed in earnest, and guaranteed to warm the age-chilled balls of a Nestor or a Priam.

Source: Juvenal, *Sixth Satire* 301–26; based on Juvenal: *The Sixteen Satires*, trans. Peter Green (New York: 1974), pp. 138–39 (modified).

Questions for Analysis

1. Compare Juvenal’s account of female behavior to the legend of Lucretia, on the one hand, and Plutarch’s description of Cleopatra, on the other. What can you conclude about attitudes to women and to sexual morality? Why and on what grounds would men living under the Principate hold women responsible for society’s ills?
2. In your view, what are the benefits and the drawbacks of the *Satires* as a historical source?

sketches a typical career: born in Serdica (modern Sofia, in Bulgaria) to a local man named Szdapezematygus, he rose through the ranks to become sergeant of the First Thracian Cavalry under the emperor Claudius and one of the first Roman colonists of Britannia.

Even the outer fringes of the empire need to be understood as part of Rome’s orbit. Although historians speak of the empire’s “borders” for the sake of convenience, these were in fact permeable zones of intensive interaction. Roman influence reached far beyond these zones, into the heartland of Germania and lands farther to the east. By the middle of the third century C.E., when some frontier garrisons were withdrawn to take part in civil wars within the empire, many of these peoples moved southward, too, sometimes as plunderers but more often as aspiring Romans (see Chapter 6).

The Entertainments of Empire

The cultural and intellectual developments of the late republic came to fruition during the Principate, and are richly reflected in its literature. For the first time, Latin began to replace Greek as a language of learning and poetry—much of it, not surprisingly, propagandistic: its purpose was to advertise and justify Rome’s achievements. The poetry of Publius Virgilius Maro (Virgil, 70–19 B.C.E.) is typical, and we have already noted his strategic use of “prophecy” in the story of Aeneas. Other major poets of the Augustan age were Quintus Horatius Flaccus (Horace, 65–8 B.C.E.) and Publius Ovidius Naso (Ovid, 43 B.C.E.–17 C.E.): the former a master of the lovely short lyric and the latter our major source for Greek mythology, which he retold in a long poem called the *Metamorphoses* (“Transformations”).



THE ROMAN EMPIRE AT ITS GREATEST EXTENT, 97–117 C.E. ■ How much farther north and west does the empire now reach compared to its earlier extent (see map on page 119)? ■ How did geography influence the process of expansion? ■ How did it dictate its limits? ■ For example, what role do major river systems seem to play?

After Augustus's death, Roman authors had more license and became important cultural critics. The tales of Petronius and Apuleius describe the more bizarre and sometimes sordid aspects of Roman life, and the satirist Juvenal (60?–140 C.E.) wrote with savage wit about the moral degeneracy he saw in his contemporaries. A similar attitude toward Roman society characterizes the writings of Tacitus (55?–117? C.E.), an aristocratic historian who describes the events and people of his age largely for the purpose of passing judgment on them. His *Annals* offer a subtle but devastating portrait of the political system constructed by Augustus and ruled by his heirs; his *Germania* contrasts the manly virtues of northern barbarians with the effeminate vices of the decadent Romans.

To many people today, the most fascinating (and repellant) aspect of Roman culture during the Principate

was its spectacular cruelty. Gladiatorial contests were not new, but they were now presented in amphitheaters built to hold tens of thousands. Everyone, even emperors, attended these events, and they became increasingly bloody and brutal as people demanded more and more innovative violence. Individual gladiators fought to the death with swords or the exotic weapons of their homelands. Teams of gladiators fought pitched battles, often simulating historic Roman victories. Occasionally, a wealthy entrepreneur would fill an arena with water and stage a naval battle. Hundreds of men would die in these organized slaughters. On other occasions, hundreds of half-starved animals imported from Africa, India, or the forests of Germania would tear one another—or their human victims—apart. When a fighter went down with a disabling wound, the crowd would be asked to decide whether to spare his life or to kill him. If the arena floor

became too slippery with blood, a fresh layer of sand would be spread over the gore so that the performance could continue.

Roman Art, Architecture, and Engineering

Like Latin literature, Roman art assumed its distinctive character during the Principate. Before this time, most artworks displayed in Roman homes were Hellenistic imports. As demand for such works increased, hundreds of copies were made by Roman artisans. In many cases, these copies proved more durable than their originals; in Chapter 4, for example, we were able to examine the lost Aphrodite of Knidos, courtesy of Roman sculptors.

Encouraged by the patronage of Augustus and his successors, artists began to experiment with more distinctively Roman styles and subjects. The relief sculpture of this period is particularly notable for its delicacy and naturalism, and sculptors also became adept at portraiture. Painting, however, was the Romans' most original and most intimate art. Romans loved intense colors, and those who could afford it surrounded themselves with brilliant wall paintings and mosaics made of tiny fragments of glass and stone, which were often set into the floors of houses or which formed the centerpieces of gardens. Lavish mosaics have been found in the remains of Roman



THE COLOSSEUM. Constructed between 75 and 80 C.E., this was the first amphitheater in Rome purposely built to showcase gladiatorial combats. Prior to this, gladiators would often fight in improvised arenas in the Forum or in other public places. ■ How does this fact change your perception of Roman history?



ROMAN AQUEDUCT IN SOUTHERN GAUL (FRANCE). Aqueducts conveyed water from mountains and lakes to the larger cities of the Roman Empire. The massive arches shown here were originally part of a 31-mile-long complex that supplied water to the city of Nemausus (Nîmes). It is now known as the Pont du Gard (Bridge of the Gardon), reflecting the use to which it was put after the aqueduct ceased to function, some eight centuries after its construction in the first century C.E. Many Roman aqueducts remained operational into the modern era: the one at Segovia, Spain was still in use at the end of the twentieth century. ■ What does the magnitude and longevity of such projects tell us about Roman power and technology?

villas in all the territories of the empire, and similar design features indicate that many were mosaic “kits” that could be ordered from a manufacturer, who would ship out all the necessary components, along with a team of workmen to assemble them.

Augustus liked to boast that he had found Rome a city of clay and left it a city of marble. But in reality, marble was too precious to be used in common construction. Instead, marble panels or ornaments were added to the facings of buildings that were otherwise made of concrete. For the Roman had discovered how to make a mixture of quicklime, volcanic ash, and pumice, and it was this—along with superior engineering skills—that allowed them to build massive structures like the Colosseum, which could accommodate 50,000 spectators at gladiatorial combats.

Roman engineers also excelled in the building of roads and bridges, many of which were constructed by Rome's armies as they moved into new territories. Like the Persian Royal Road of the sixth century B.C.E. or the German Autobahn of the 1930s and the interstate highways of the United States begun in the 1950s, roads have always been, first and foremost, a device for moving armies and then, secondarily, for moving goods and people. Many of these Roman roads still survive, or form the basis for modern European highways. In Britain, for example, the only major thoroughfares before the building of high-speed motorways were based on Roman roads, to which the motorways now run parallel.

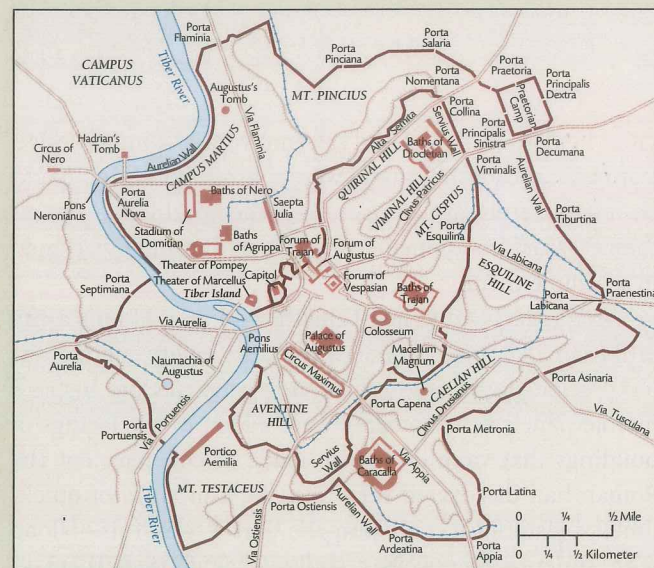
Interpreting Visual Evidence

Roman Urban Planning

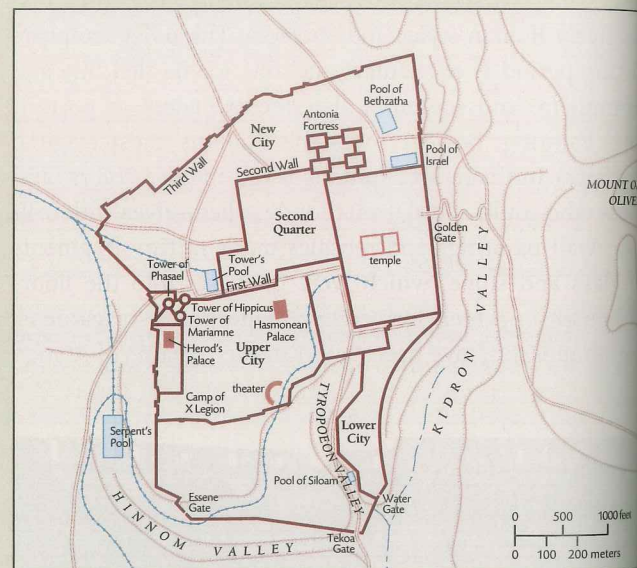
Prior to Roman imperial expansion, most cities in the ancient world were not planned cities—with the exception of the new settlements established by Alexander the Great, notably Alexandria in Egypt. Rome itself was not carefully planned, but grew up over many

centuries, expanding outward and up the slopes of its seven hills from the nucleus of the Forum. By the time of Augustus, it was a haphazard jumble of buildings and narrow streets. Outside of Rome, however, the efficiency of Roman government was in large part due to the uniformity of imperial urban planning. As their colonial reach expanded,

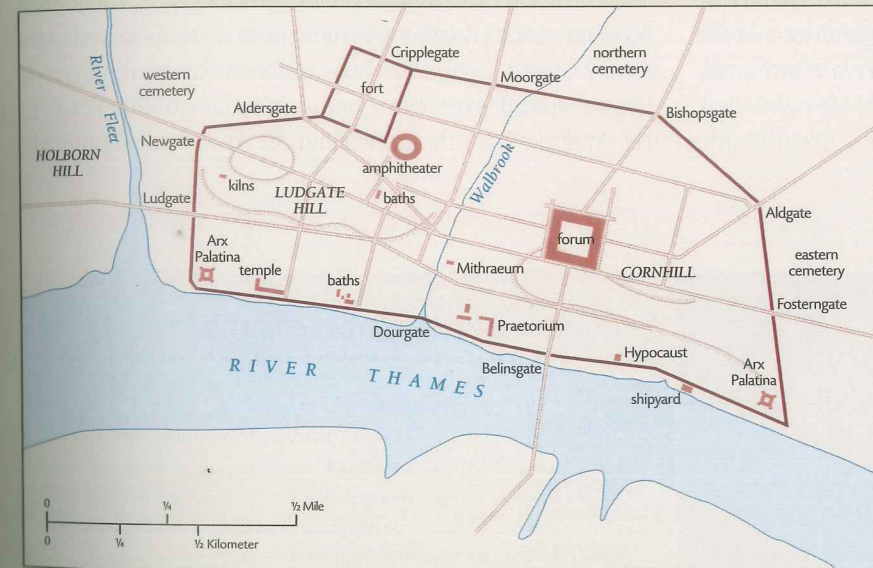
Romans sought to ensure that travelers moving within their vast domain would encounter the same amenities in every major city. They also wanted to convey, through the organization of the urban landscape, the ubiquity of Roman authority and majesty.



A. Imperial Rome



B. Roman settlement in Aelia Capitolina (Jerusalem) after 135 C.E.



C. London under the Romans, c. 200 C.E.

The inhabitants of Roman cities also enjoyed the benefits of a public water supply. By the early decades of the second century C.E., eleven aqueducts brought water into Rome from the nearby hills for drinking and bathing and for flushing a well-designed sewage system. These amenities were common in cities throughout the empire, and the homes of the wealthy even had indoor plumbing and central heating. Water was also funneled into the homes of the rich for private gardens, fountains, and pools. The emperor Nero (54–68 C.E.) built a famous Golden House

with special pipes that sprinkled his guests with perfume. baths supplied with medicinal waters, and a pond “like a sea.” “At last,” said Nero on moving day, “I can live like a human being.”

The Reach of Roman Law

Roman architecture and engineering are impressive, but the most durable and useful of this civilization's

Questions for Analysis

1. Looking closely at the map of Rome (map A), how have topographical features—like the river Tiber and the seven hills—determined the shape and layout of the city? What are the major buildings and public areas? What were the functions of these spaces,

and what do they reveal about Roman society and values?

2. Compare the plan of Rome to those of Roman Jerusalem (map B) and London (map C). What features do all three have in common, and why? What features are unique to each place, and what might this reveal

about the different regions of the empire and the needs of the different cities' inhabitants?

3. Given that all Roman cities share certain features, what message(s) were Roman authorities trying to convey to inhabitants and travelers through urban planning? Why, for example, would they have insisted on rebuilding Jerusalem as a Roman city—Aelia Capitolina—after the rebellion of 135 C.E.?

legacies was its legal system. Over the course of several centuries, the primitive code of the Twelve Tables was largely replaced by a series of new laws that reflect the changing needs of Rome's diverse and ever-growing population.

The most sweeping legal changes occurred during the Principate. This was partly because the reach of Roman law had to match the reach of the empire. But the major reason for the rapid development of Roman legal thinking during these years was the fact that Augustus and his

successors appointed a small number of eminent jurists to deliver opinions on the issues raised by cases under trial in the courts. The five most prominent of these experts flourished in the second century C.E.: Gaius (only this most common of his names is known), Domitius Ulpianus (Ulpian), Modestinus, Aemelianus Papinianus (Papinian), and Paulus. Taken together, their legal opinions constitute the first philosophy of law and the foundation for all subsequent jurisprudence, a word derived from the Latin phrase meaning “legal wisdom.”

As it was developed by the jurists, Roman law comprised three great branches: civil law, the law of nations, and natural law. Civil law was the law of Rome and its citizens, both written and unwritten. It included the statutes of the Senate, the decrees of the emperor, the edicts of magistrates, and ancient customs that had the force of law (like the *mos maiorum*). The law of nations was not specific to Rome but extended to all people of the world regardless of their origins and ethnicity: it is the precursor of international law. This law authorized slavery; protected the private ownership of property; and defined the mechanisms of purchase and sale, partnership, and contract. It supplemented civil law and applied especially to those inhabitants of the empire who were not citizens, as well as to foreigners.

The most interesting (and in many ways the most important) branch of Roman law was natural law, a product not of judicial practice but of legal philosophy. Roman Stoics, following in the footsteps of Cicero, posited that nature itself is rationally ordered, and that careful study will reveal the laws by which the natural world operates, including natural justice. They affirmed that all men are by nature equal, and that they are entitled to certain basic rights that governments have no authority to transgress. Accordingly,

no person or institution has the authority to infringe on this law, repeal it, or ignore it. This law supersedes any state or ruler; a ruler who transgresses it is a tyrant.

Although the practical law applied in local Roman courts often bore little resemblance to the law of nature, the development of a concept of abstract justice as a fundamental principle was one of the noblest achievements of Roman civilization. It has given us the doctrine of human rights, even if it has not resulted in ending abuses of those rights.

CONCLUSION

The resemblances between Rome's history and that of Great Britain and the United States have often been noted. Like the British Empire, the Roman Empire was founded on conquest and overseas colonization intended to benefit both the homeland and its colonial subjects, who were seen as the beneficiaries of a "civilizing mission." Like America's, the Roman economy evolved from agrarianism to a complex system of domestic and foreign markets, problems of unemployment, gross disparities of wealth, and vulnerability to financial crisis. And like both the British and the American empires, the

Roman Empire justified itself by celebrating the peace its conquests allegedly brought to the world.

Ultimately, however, such parallels break down when we remember that Rome's civilization differed profoundly from any society of the modern world. It was not an industrialized society. Its government never pretended to be representative of all its citizens. Roman class divisions are not directly comparable to ours. The Roman economy rested on slavery to a degree unmatched in any modern state. As a result, technological advances were not encouraged, social stratification was extreme, and gender relations were profoundly unequal. Religious practice and political life were inseparable.

Nevertheless, the civilization of ancient Rome continues to structure our everyday lives in ways so profound that they often go unnoticed. Our days are mapped onto the Roman calendar. The constitution of the United States is largely modeled on that of the Republic, and Roman architecture survives in the design of our public buildings. Roman law forms the basis of most European legal codes, and American judges still cite Gaius and Ulpian. Virtually all modern sculpture is inspired by Roman sculpture, and Roman authors continue to set the standards for

prose composition in many Western countries. Indeed, most European languages are either derived from Latin—Romance languages are so called because they are "Roman-like"—or have borrowed Latin grammatical structures or vocabulary. As we shall see in the following chapters, the organization of the modern Roman Catholic Church can be traced back to the structure of the Roman state: even today, the pope bears the title of Rome's high priest, *pontifex maximus*.

But perhaps the most important of all Rome's contributions was its role as mediator between Europe and the civilizations of the ancient Near East and Mediterranean. Had Rome's empire not come to encompass much of Europe, there would be no such thing as the concept of Western civilization and no shared ideas and heritage to link us to those distant places and times. Although we shall pursue the history of Rome's fragmentation and witness the emergence of three different civilizations in the territories once united by its empire, we shall see that they all shared a common cultural inheritance. In this sense, the Roman Empire did not collapse. But it was transformed, and the factors driving that transformation will be the subject of Chapter 6.

After You Read This Chapter



Go to **INQUIZITIVE** to see what you've learned—and learn what you've missed—with personalized feedback along the way.

REVIEWING THE OBJECTIVES

- The founding of the Roman Republic was both a cherished myth and a series of events. What factors contributed to this unique system of government?
- The shared identity and values of the Roman people differed in many ways from those of other ancient civilizations. What were some of these major differences?
- Rome's population was divided among classes of people who often struggled with one another for power. Identify these classes and their points of contention.
- The expansion of Rome's empire had a profound impact on Roman society. Why?
- The establishment of the Principate ushered in a new era in the history of Rome. What events led to this?

PEOPLE, IDEAS, AND EVENTS IN CONTEXT

- In what ways were the early Romans influenced by their **ETRUSCAN** neighbors and by their location in central **ITALY**?
- What were the components of the **REPUBLIC'S CONSTITUTION**? What was the relationship between **ROMAN CITIZENSHIP** and the **ROMAN ARMY** in this era?
- How do the stories of **AENEAS**, **LUCRETIA**, and **CINCINNATUS** reflect core Roman values? How did those values, summarized in the phrase **MOS MAIORUM**, set the Romans apart from the other civilizations we have studied?
- Why did the Romans come into conflict with **CARTHAGE**? How did the **PUNIC WARS** and Rome's other conquests change the balance of power in the Mediterranean?
- How did **IMPERIALISM** and contact with **HELLENISTIC CULTURE** affect the core values of Roman society, its economy, and its political system? What role did **SLAVERY** play in this civilization?
- What were the major crises of the late republic, and what were the means by which ambitious men achieved power? How did **JULIUS CAESAR** emerge triumphant, and why was he assassinated?
- In what ways did the **PRINCIPATE** differ from the **REPUBLIC**? What were the new powers of the **EMPEROR**, and how did **AUGUSTUS** exemplify these?
- How did the Romans consolidate their **EMPIRE** during the **PAX ROMANA**? By what means did they spread Roman culture?

THINKING ABOUT CONNECTIONS

- Polybius believed that the Roman Republic would last forever, because it fused together aspects of monarchy, aristocracy, and polity. What were the chief factors that led to its demise in the first century B.C.E.? Could these have been avoided—and if so, how?
- In what ways does the Roman Empire share the characteristics of earlier empires, especially that of Alexander? In what ways does it differ from them?
- The Roman Empire could be said to resemble our own civilization in different ways. What features does today's United States share with the Republic? With the Principate? What lessons can we draw from this?