CHAPTER 4

The Roman Republic

FORUM IN ROME. The forum, a large rectangular space that served as a marketplace, was the center of a Roman city. In Rome itself, the forum evolved into a political center surrounded by large public buildings. (©Karen Tweedy-Holmes/Corbis)
from the creation of a multinational empire. The city of Rome was evolving into
the city of humanity—the cosmopolis envisioned by the Stoics.

Polybius
THE ROMAN ARMY

The discipline and dedication of the citizen-soldiers help explain Rome's suc-
cess in conquering a world empire. In the following account, Polybius (c. 200–
c. 118 B.C.) tells how the commanders enforced obedience and fostered heroism.

A court-martial composed of the tribunes im-
mediately sits to try him [a soldier], and if he
is found guilty, he is punished by beating (jus-
tuarium). This is carried out as follows. The tri-
bune takes a cudgel and lightly touches the
condemned man with it, whereupon all the
soldiers fall upon him with clubs and stones,
and usually kill him in the camp itself. But
even those who contrive to escape are no better
off. How indeed could they be? They are not
allowed to return to their homes, and none of
their family would dare to receive such a man
into the house. Those who have once fallen
into this misfortune are completely and finally
ruined. The *optio* [lieutenant] and the *decurio*
[sergeant] of the squadron are liable to the
same punishment if they fail to pass on the
proper orders at the proper moment to the pa-
trols and the *decurio* of the next squadron. The
consequence of the extreme severity of this
penalty and of the absolute impossibility of
avoiding it is that the night watches of the Ro-
man army are faultlessly kept.

The ordinary soldiers are answerable to the
tribunes [elected military administrators] and
the tribunes to the consuls [commanders]. A
tribune, and in the case of the allies a prefect
[commander of a large unit], has power to
inflict fines, distrain on [confiscate] goods, and
to order a flogging. The punishment of beating
to death is also inflicted upon those who steal
from the camp, those who give false evidence,
those who in full manhood commit homosex-
ual offences, and finally upon anyone who has
been punished three times for the same of-
fence. The above are the offences which are
punished as crimes. The following actions are
regarded as unmanly and dishonourable in a
soldier: to make a false report to the tribune of
your courage in the field in order to earn dis-
tinction; to leave the post to which you have
been assigned in a covering force because of
fear, and similarly to throw away out of fear
any of your weapons on the field of battle. For
this reason the men who have been posted to
a covering force are often doomed to certain
death. This is because they will remain at their
posts even when they are overwhelmingly out-
numbered on account of their dread of the
punishment that awaits them. Again, those
who have lost a shield or a sword or any other
weapon on the battlefield often hurl them-
selves upon the enemy hoping that they will
either recover the weapon they have lost, or
else escape by death from the inevitable dis-
grace and the humiliations they would suffer at
home.

If it ever happens that a large body of men
break and run in this way and whole maniples
[units of 120 to 300 men] desert their posts
under extreme pressure, the officers reject the
idea of beating to death or executing all who
are guilty, but the solution they adopt is as ef-
fective as it is terrifying. The tribune calls the
legion [large military unit] on parade and
brings to the front those who are guilty of hav-
ing left the ranks. He then reprimands them
sharply, and finally chooses by lot some five or
eight or twenty of the offenders, the number
being calculated so that it represents about a
tenth\(^1\) of those who have shown themselves guilty of cowardice. Those on whom the lot has fallen are mercilessly clubbed to death in the manner I have already described. The rest are put on rations of barley instead of wheat, and are ordered to quarter themselves outside the camp in a place which has no defences. The danger and the fear of drawing the fatal lot threatens every man equally, and since there is no certainty on whom it may fall, and the public disgrace of receiving rations of barley is shared by all alike, the Romans have adopted the best possible practice both to inspire terror and to repair the harm done by any weakening of their warlike spirit.

The Romans also have an excellent method of encouraging young soldiers to face danger. Whenever any have especially distinguished themselves in a battle, the general assembles the troops and calls forward those he considers to have shown exceptional courage. He praises them first for their gallantry in action and for anything in their previous conduct which is particularly worthy of mention, and then he distributes gifts such as the following: to a man who has wounded one of the enemy, a spear; to one who has killed and stripped an enemy, a cup if he is in the infantry, or horse-trappings if in the cavalry—originally the gift was simply a lance. These presentations are not made to men who have wounded or stripped an enemy in the course of a pitched battle, or at the storming of a city, but to those who during a skirmish or some similar situation in which there is no necessity to engage in single combat, have voluntarily and deliberately exposed themselves to danger.

At the storming of a city the first man to scale the wall is awarded a crown of gold. In the same way those who have shielded and saved one of their fellow-citizens or of the allies are honoured with gifts from the consul, and the men whose lives they have preserved present them of their own free will with a crown; if not, they are compelled to do so by the tribunes who judge the case. Moreover, a man who has been saved in this way reveres his rescuer as a father for the rest of his life and must treat him as if he were a parent. And so by means of such incentives even those who stay at home feel the impulse to emulate such achievements in the field no less than those who are present and see and hear what takes place. For the men who receive these trophies not only enjoy great prestige in the army and soon afterwards in their homes, but they are also singled out for precedence in religious processions when they return. On these occasions nobody is allowed to wear decorations save those who have been honoured for their bravery by the consuls, and it is the custom to hang up the trophies they have won in the most conspicuous places in their houses, and to regard them as proofs and visible symbols of their valour. So when we consider this people’s almost obsessive concern with military rewards and punishments, and the immense importance which they attach to both, it is not surprising that they emerge with brilliant success from every war in which they engage.

\(^1\)This custom is the origin of the word \textit{decimate}, from the Latin \textit{decem}, ten.

\textbf{REVIEW QUESTIONS}

1. How did the Romans ensure good discipline among their soldiers?
2. What factors mentioned by Polybius help explain Rome’s emergence as a great power?
2 The Punic Wars

In 264 B.C., Rome, which had just completed its conquest of Italy, went to war with Carthage, the dominant power in the western Mediterranean. A threat to the north Sicilian city of Messana (now Messina) was the immediate cause of the war. Rome feared that Carthage might use Messana as a springboard from which to attack the cities of southern Italy, which were allied to Rome, or to interfere with their trade. The First Punic War (264-241 B.C.) was a grueling conflict; drawing manpower from its loyal allies, Rome finally prevailed. Carthage surrendered Sicily to Rome, and three years later Rome seized the large islands of Corsica and Sardinia, west of Italy, from a weakened Carthage.

Livy

THE SECOND PUNIC WAR:
THE THREAT FROM HANNIBAL

Carthaginian expansion in Spain led to the Second Punic War (218–201 B.C.). The Carthaginian army was led by Hannibal (247–183 B.C.), whose military genius impressed and frightened Rome. Hannibal brought the battle to Rome by leading his seasoned army, including war elephants, across the Alps into Italy.

Hannibal demonstrated his superb generalship at the battle of Cannae in 216 B.C., where the Carthaginians destroyed a Roman army of sixty thousand. Hannibal removed some of his soldiers in the center and commanded the thin line to retreat as the Romans charged. Believing that the enemy was on the run, the Romans continued their headlong thrust into the Carthaginian center. Then, according to plan, Carthaginian troops stationed on the wings attacked the Roman flanks and the cavalry closed in on the Roman rear, completely encircling the Roman troops. News of the disaster, one of the worst in the Republic's history, brought anguish to Romans, who feared that Hannibal would march on the capital itself. Adding to Rome's distress was the desertion of some of its Italian allies to Hannibal. In the following passage, the Roman historian Livy (59 B.C.—A.D. 17) describes the mood in Rome after Cannae.

... Never, without an enemy actually within the gates, had there been such terror and confusion in the city [Rome]. To write of it is beyond my strength, so I shall not attempt to describe what any words of mine would only make less than the truth. In the previous year a consul and his army had been lost at Trasimene [location of an overwhelming defeat for Rome], and now there was news not merely of another similar blow, but of a multiple calamity—two consular armies annihilated, both consuls1 dead, Rome left without a force in the field, without a commander, without a single soldier, Apulia and Samnium [two provinces in southern Italy] in Hannibal's hands, and now nearly the whole of Italy overrun. No other nation in the world

1The consuls served dual offices as elected magistrates of Rome in peacetime and commanders-in-chief of the Roman army.
could have suffered so tremendous a series of disasters, and not been overwhelmed. It was unparalleled in history: the naval defeat off the Aegates islands,* a defeat which forced the Carthaginians to abandon Sicily and Sardinia and suffer themselves to pay taxes and tribute to Rome; the final defeat in Africa to which Hannibal himself afterwards succumbed—neither the one nor the other was in any way comparable to what Rome had now to face, except in the fact that they were not borne with so high a courage.

The praetors Philus and Pomponius summoned the Senate* to meet . . . to consider the defence of the City, as nobody doubted that Hannibal, now that the armies were destroyed, would attack Rome—the final operation to crown his victory. It was not easy to work out a plan: their troubles, already great enough, were made worse by the lack of firm news; the streets were loud with the wailing and weeping of women, and nothing yet being clearly known, living and dead alike were being mourned in nearly every house in the city. In these circumstances, Quintus Fabius Maximus put forward some proposals: riders, he suggested, lightly equipped, should be sent out along the Appian and Latin Ways to question any survivors they might meet roaming the countryside, and report any tidings they could get from them of what had happened to the consuls and the armies. If the gods, in pity for the empire, had suffered any of the Roman name to survive, they should inquire where they were, where Hannibal went after the battle, what his plans were, what he was doing, and what he was likely to do next. The task of collecting this information should be entrusted to vigorous and active men. There was also a task, Fabius suggested, for the Senate itself to perform, as there was a lack of public officers: this was, to get rid of the general confusion in the city and restore some sort of order. Women must be forbidden to appear out of doors, and compelled to stay in their homes; family mourning should be checked, and silence imposed everywhere; anyone with news to report should be taken to the praetors, and all individuals should await in their homes the news which personally concerned them. Furthermore, guards should be posted at the gates to prevent anyone from leaving the city, and every man and woman should be made to believe that there was no hope of safety except within the walls of Rome. Once, he ended, the present noise and disorder were under control, then would be the proper time to recall the Senate and debate measures for defence.

The proposals of Fabius won unanimous support. The city magistrates cleared the crowds out of the forum and the senators went off to restore some sort of order in the streets. . . .

How much more serious was the defeat at Cannae than those which had preceded it can be seen by the behaviour of Rome’s allies: before that fatal day their loyalty had remained unshaken; now it began to waver, for the simple reason that they despaired of the survival of Roman power. The following peoples went over to the Carthaginian cause: the Atellani, Calatini, Hirsipini, some of the Apulians, all the Samnites except the Pentri, the Bruttii, the Lucanians, the Uzentini, and nearly all the Greek settlements on the coast, namely Tarentum, Metapontum, Croton, and Locri, and all the Gauls on the Italian side of the Alps.

But neither the defeats they had suffered nor the subsequent defection of all these allied peoples moved the Romans ever to breathe a word about peace.
Appian of Alexandria
THE THIRD PUNIC WAR: THE DESTRUCTION OF CARTHAGE

Despite his brilliant victory at Cannae, Hannibal lacked the manpower to deal Rome a knockout blow, and the Romans, respecting Hannibal's generalship, refused to engage his army in another major encounter. Finally, when Rome invaded North Africa and threatened Carthage, Hannibal quit Italy to defend his homeland and was defeated at the battle of Zama in 202 B.C.

Although Carthage, now a second-rate power, no longer posed a threat, Rome started the Third Punic War in 149 B.C. Driven by old hatreds and the traumatic memory of Hannibal's near conquest of Italy, Rome resolved to destroy Carthage. After Carthage fell in 146 B.C., Rome sold the survivors into slavery, obliterated the city, and turned the land into a province, which was named Africa. The savage and irrational behavior of Rome toward a helpless Carthage showed an early deterioration in senatorial leadership. In the following passage, Appian of Alexandria (A.D. 95–c. 165) describes the destruction of Carthage by the Romans under Scipio Aemilianus (185–129 B.C.).

Now Scipio hastened to the attack of Byrsa, the strongest part of the city [of Carthage], where the greater part of the inhabitants had taken refuge. There were three streets ascending from the forum to this fortress, along which, on either side, were houses built closely together and six stories high, from which the Romans were assailed with missiles. They were compelled, therefore, to possess themselves of the first ones and use those as a means of expelling the occupants of the next. When they had mastered the first, they threw timbers from one to another over the narrow passageways, and crossed as on bridges. While war was raging in this way on the roofs, another fight was going on among those who met each other in the streets below. All places were filled with groans, shrieks, shouts, and every kind of agony. Some were stabbed, others were hurled alive from the roofs to the pavement, some of them alighting on the heads of spears or other pointed weapons, or swords. No one dared to set fire to the houses on account of those who were still on the roofs, until Scipio reached Byrsa. Then he set fire to the three streets all together, and gave orders to keep the passageways clear of burning material so that the army might move back and forth freely.

Then came new scenes of horror. As the fire spread and carried everything down, the soldiers did not wait to destroy the buildings little by little, but all in a heap. So the crashing grew louder, and many corpses fell with the stones into the midst. Others were seen still living, especially old men, women, and young children who had hidden in the inmost nooks of the houses, some of them wounded, some more or less burned, and uttering piteous cries. Still others, thrust out and falling from such a height with the stones, timbers, and fire, were torn asunder in all shapes of horror, crushed and mangled. Nor was this the end of their miseries, for the street cleaners, who were removing the rubbish with axes, mattocks, and forks, and making the roads passable, tossed with these instruments the dead and the living together into holes in the ground, dragging them along like sticks and stones and turning them over with their iron tools. Trenches were filled with men. Some who were thrown in head foremost, with their legs sticking out of the ground, writhed a long time. Others fell with their feet
downward and their heads above ground. Horses ran over them, crushing their faces and skulls, not purposely on the part of the riders, but in their headlong haste. Nor did the street cleaners do these things on purpose; but the tug of war, the glory of approaching victory, the rush of the soldiery, the orders of the officers, the blast of the trumpets, tribunes and centurions marching their cohorts hither and thither—all together made everybody frantic and heedless of the spectacles under their eyes.

Six days and nights were consumed in this kind of fighting, the soldiers being changed so that they might not be worn out with toil, slaughter, want of sleep, and those horrid sights....

Scipio, beholding this city, which had flourished 700 years from its foundation and had ruled over so many lands, islands, and seas, rich with arms and fleets, elephants and money, equal to the mightiest monarchies but far surpassing them in bravery and high spirit (since without ships or arms, and in the face of famine, it had sustained continuous war for three years), now come to its end in total destruction—Scipio, beholding this spectacle, is said to have shed tears and publicly lamented the fortune of the enemy. After meditating by himself a long time and reflecting on the rise and fall of cities, nations, and empires, as well as of individuals, upon the fate of Troy, that once proud city, upon that of the Assyrians, the Medes, and the Persians, greatest of all, and later the splendid Macedonian empire, either voluntarily or otherwise the words of the poet escaped his lips:—

"The day shall come in which our sacred Troy
And Priam, and the people over whom
Spear-bearing Priam rules, shall perish all."

(The Iliad, vi, 448, 449; Bryant's translation.)

Being asked by Polybius in familiar conversation (for Polybius had been his tutor) what he meant by using these words, he said that he did not hesitate frankly to name his own country, for whose fate he feared when he considered the mutability of human affairs. And Polybius wrote this down just as he heard it.

1Centurions were noncommissioned officers, each commanding a hundred men; attached to each legion were six military tribunes, who had been voted in by the citizens of Rome in the general elections.

2Priam, in Homer's epic poem The Iliad, was the king of Troy at the time of the Trojan War.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Describe the mood in Rome after the battle of Cannae.
2. After the Roman disaster at Cannae, what actions did Quintus Fabius Maximus propose?
3. What do you think prompted Scipio Aemilianus to quote the lines from Homer's Iliad?

3. The Spread of Greek Philosophy to Rome

One of the chief consequences of Roman expansion was growing contact with Greek culture. During the third century B.C., Greek civilization started to exercise an increasing and fruitful influence on the Roman mind. Greek teachers, both slave and free, came to Rome and introduced Romans to Hellenic cultural achievements.
As they conquered the eastern Mediterranean, Roman generals began to ship libraries and works of art from Greek cities to Rome. Roman sculpture and painting imitated Greek prototypes. In time, Romans acquired from Greece knowledge of scientific thought, medicine, and geography. Roman writers and orators used Greek history, poetry, and oratory as models. Roman philosophers borrowed the ideas of Greek philosophical schools and adapted them to Roman culture.

Lucretius

DENUNCIATION OF RELIGION

The writings of the Greek philosopher Epicurus (see page 91) soon won admirers in Rome. Lucretius (c. 96–c. 55 B.C.), the leading Roman Epicurean philosopher, lived in a time of civil war, which was fostered by two generals, Marius and Sulla. Distraught by the seemingly endless strife, Lucretius yearned for philosophical tranquillity. Like Epicurus, he believed that religion prompted people to perform evil deeds and caused them to experience terrible anxiety about death and eternal punishment. Like his mentor, Lucretius advanced a materialistic conception of nature, one that left no room for the activity of gods—mechanical laws, not the gods, governed all physical happenings. To dispel the fear of punishment after death, Lucretius marshaled arguments to prove that the soul perishes with the body. He proposed that the simple life, devoid of political involvement and excessive passion, was the highest good. Epicurus’ disparagement of politics and public service and rejection of the goals of power and glory ran counter to the accepted Roman ideal of virtue. On the other hand, his praise of the quiet life amid a community of friends and his advice on how to deal with life’s misfortunes with serenity had great appeal to first-century Romans who were disgusted with civil strife.

In the following selection from *On the Nature of Things*, Lucretius expresses his hostility to religion and his admiration for Epicurus, “the first to stand firm in defiance” of the fables about the gods.

*When before our eyes man’s life lay groveling, prostrate,*

*Crushed to the dust under the burden of Religion*

*(Which thrust its head from heaven, its horrible face Glowering over mankind born to die), One man, a Greek [Epicurus], was the first mortal who dared Oppose his eyes, the first to stand firm in defiance. Not the fables of gods, nor lightning, nor the menacing Rumble of heaven could daunt him, but all the more*

*They whetted his keen mind with longing to be First to smash open the tight-barred gates of Nature. His vigor of mind prevailed, and he strode far Beyond the fiery battlements of the world, Raiding the fields of the unmeasured All. Our victor returns with knowledge of what can arise, What cannot, what law grants each thing its own Deep-driven boundary stone and finite scope. Religion now lies trampled beneath our feet, And we are made gods by the victory.*
In Greek mythology, Agamemnon was compelled to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia. A seer had declared that the goddess Artemis demanded the sacrifice. For Lucretius, this event illustrates how religion “gives birth to evil and blasphemous deeds.”

You hear these things, and I fear you’ll think yourself On the road to evil, learning the fundamentals Of blasphemy. Not so! Too often Religion Herself gives birth to evil and blasphemous deeds. At Aulis, for instance: the pride of the Greek people, The chosen peers, defiled Diana’s altar With the shameful blood of the virgin Iphigenia. As soon as they tressed her hair with the ritual fillet [headband], The tassels spilling neatly upon each cheek, And she sensed her grieving father beside the altar With the acolytes nearby, hiding the knife, And countrymen weeping to look upon her—mute With fear, she fell to her knees, she groped for the earth. Poor girl, what good did it do her then, that she Was the first to give the king the name of “father”? Up to the altar the men escorted her, trembling: Not so that when her solemn rites were finished She might be cheered in the ringing wedding-hymn, But filthily, at the marrying age, unblemished Victim, she fell by her father’s slaughter-stroke. . . .

Lucretius attempts to explain why people came to believe in powerful gods.

How the idea of gods spread to all nations, Stocking their cities with altars and making men tremble To undertake the solemn rites, which flourish With all our luxury and magnificence (Even now sowing in us the seeds of horror, Urging us on to rear across the world New shrines to the gods to crowd on festival days), Is not hard to explain in a few words. In those days mortal men saw while awake The excellent countenances of the gods, Or rather in dreams they gasped at their vast size. Men lent sensation to these giant forms For they moved their limbs, it seemed, and spoke proud words As arrogant as their beauty and great strength. Eternal life they gave them, for their faces And their physiques persisted ever-present, And they thought that beings endowed with such great power Could never be put to rout by any force. They thought the gods preeminently blest, For the fear of death could hardly trouble them; Also because in dreams they saw them do Miraculous things, and many, without an effort. Then too they saw the systems of the sky Turn in sure order, and the changing seasons, But could not understand why this occurred. Their refuge, then: assign to the gods all things, Have them steer all things with a single nod. In the heavens they placed the holy haunts of the gods For through the heavens wheeled the night and the moon, The moon and the day, the night and night’s stark signs, And night-roaming torches of heaven and gliding flames, Clouds, sun, storms, snow, high winds and hail and lightning And the sudden growl and great and menacing rumble.

Unhappy human race—to grant such feats To gods, and then to add vindictiveness!

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1Diana was the Roman goddess of nature and protector of women.
What wailing did they bring forth for themselves,
What wounds for us, what tears for our descendants!
It's no piety to be seen at every altar,
To cover your head and turn to the stone idol,
Or to flatten yourself on the ground and lift your palms
To the shrines, or to spray altars with the blood
Of cattle—so much!—or to string vow on vow.
To observe all things with a mind at peace
Is piety. For when we look up to the heavenly
Shrines of this great world, the stars that
Studded, when we think of the journeying sun
and moon,
Then in hearts heavy-laden with other cares
That Trouble is roused to boot, and rears its head—
That the limitless power of gods, the power
that wheels
The stars and planets, may be aimed at us.
Then ignorance assails the mind in doubt
About the universe's origin,
About the end, how long the walls of the world
Can suffer the straining of such stir and motion,
Or whether, granted everlasting health
By the gods, they can in endless course disdain
The turning age and the vast strength of time.
And worse, whose soul does not contract in fear
Of the gods, whose limbs don't crawl with terror when
The scorched earth under the terrible
lightning bolt
Quakes, and a grumbling rolls through the
great sky?
Don't people and nations tremble, and
arrogant kings
Cringe, stricken into shock by fear of the gods,
Lest for some foul deed done or proud word said
The heavy time has come to pay the price?
When a high hard gale across the plains of the sea
Rakes a commander and his fleet along
With all his mighty elephants and legions,
Won't he beseech the "Peace of the Gods" in terror
And pray for peaceful breezes and fair winds?
In vain, for the whirlpool's got him anyway
And borne him down unto the shoals of Death.
So thoroughly is human grandeur crushed
By a hidden force; the glorious rods and axes,
Those splendid mockerys, are trampled under.
Well, when the whole earth staggers underfoot
And cities are battered and fall, or threaten to fall,
What wonder if self-loathing seizes men
And they grant wondrous power over all affairs
To gods, to steer and rule the universe?

Cicero
ADVOCATE OF STOICISM

Marcus Tullius Cicero, a leading Roman statesman, was also a distinguished orator, an unsurpassed Latin stylist, and a student of Greek philosophy. His letters, more than eight hundred of which have survived, provide modern historians with valuable insights into late republican politics. His orations before the Senate and law courts have been models of eloquence and rhetorical technique for students of Latin and later European languages.

Like many other Romans, Cicero was influenced by the Greek philosophy of Stoicism (see page 136). Cicero adopted the Stoic belief that natural law governs the universe and applies to all and that all belong to a common humanity. The gift of reason, which is common to all people, enables us to comprehend this nat-
... Now let us investigate the origins of Justice. Well then, the most learned men have determined to begin with Law, and it would seem that they are right, if, according to their definition, Law is the highest reason, implanted in Nature, which commands what ought to be done and forbids the opposite. This reason, when firmly fixed and fully developed in the human mind, is Law. And so they believe that Law is intelligence whose natural function it is to command right conduct and forbid wrongdoing. They think that this quality has derived its name in Greek from the idea of granting to every man his own, and in our language I believe it has been named from the idea of choosing. For as they have attributed the idea of fairness to the word law, so we have given it that of selection, though both ideas properly belong to Law. Now if this is correct, as I think it to be in general, then the origin of Justice is to be found in Law, for Law is a natural force; it is the mind and reason of the intelligent man, the standard by which Justice and Injustice are measured. But since our whole discussion has to do with the reasoning of the populace, it will sometimes be necessary to speak in the popular manner, and give the name of law to that which in written form decrees whatever it wishes, either by command or prohibition. For such is the crowd's definition of law. But in determining what Justice is, let us begin with that supreme Law which had its origin ages before any written law existed or any State had been established.

... I shall seek the root of Justice in Nature, under whose guidance our whole discussion must be conducted.

... That animal which we call man, endowed with foresight and quick intelligence, complex, keen, possessing memory, full of reason and prudence, has been given a certain distinguished status by the supreme God who created him; for he is the only one among so many different kinds and varieties of living beings who has a share in reason and thought, while all the rest are deprived of it. But what is more divine, I will not say in man only, but in all heaven and earth, than reason? And reason, when it is full grown and perfected, is rightly called wisdom. Therefore, since there is nothing better than reason, and since it exists both in man and God, the first common possession of man and God is reason. But those who have reason in common must also have right reason in common. And since right reason is Law, we must believe that men have Law also in common with the gods. Further, those who share Law must also share Justice; and those who share these are to be regarded as members of the same commonwealth. If indeed they obey the same authorities and powers, this is true in a far greater degree; but as a matter of fact they do obey this celestial system, the divine mind, and the God of transcendent power. Hence we must now conceive of this whole universe as one commonwealth of which both gods and men are members.

Moreover, virtue exists in man and God alike, but in no other creature besides; virtue, however, is nothing else than Nature perfected and developed to its highest point; therefore there is a likeness between man and God. As this is true, what relationship could be closer or clearer than this one? For this reason, Nature has lavishly yielded such a wealth of things adapted to man's convenience and use that what she produces seems intended as a gift to us, and not brought forth by chance; and this is true, not only of what the fertile earth bountifully bestows in the form of grain and fruit, but also of the animals; for it is clear that
some of them have been created to be man's slaves, some to supply him with their products, and others to serve as his food. Moreover innumerable arts have been discovered through the teachings of Nature; for it is by a skilful imitation of her that reason has acquired the necessities of life. . . .

... Out of all the material of the philosophers' discussions, surely there comes nothing more valuable than the full realization that we are born for Justice, and that right is based, not upon men's opinions, but upon Nature. This fact will immediately be plain if you once get a clear conception of man's fellowship and union with his fellow-men. For no single thing is so like another, so exactly its counterpart, as all of us are to one another. Nay, if bad habits and false beliefs did not twist the weaker minds and turn them in whatever direction they are inclined, no one would be so like his own self as all men would be like all others. And so, however we may define man, a single definition will apply to all. This is a sufficient proof that there is no difference in kind between man and man; for if there were, one definition could not be applicable to all men; and indeed reason, which alone raises us above the level of the beasts and enables us to draw inferences, to prove and disprove, to discuss and solve problems, and to come to conclusions, is certainly common to us all, and, though varying in what it learns, at least in the capacity to learn it is invariable. For the same things are invariably perceived by the senses, and those things which stimulate the senses, stimulate them in the same way in all men; and those rudimentary beginnings of intelligence to which I have referred, which are imprinted on our minds, are imprinted on all minds alike; and speech, the mind's interpreter, though differing in the choice of words, agrees in the sentiments expressed. In fact, there is no human being of any race who, if he finds a guide, cannot attain to virtue.

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Cato the Elder: Hostility to Greek Philosophy

Some conservative Romans were hostile to the Greek influence, which they felt threatened traditional Roman values. Cato the Elder (also the Censor; 234–149 B.C.) denounced Socrates for undermining respect for Athenian law and warned that Greek philosophy might lure Roman youth into similar subversive behavior. The following passage from Plutarch's Lives (see page 90) shows Cato's hostility to Greek philosophy.

He was now grown old, when Carneades the Academic, and Diogenes the Stoic, came as deputies from Athens to Rome, praying for release from a penalty of five hundred talents laid on the Athenians, in a suit, to which they did not appear, in which the Oropians were plaintiffs and Sicyoni ans judges. All the most studious youth immediately waited on these philosophers, and frequently, with admiration, heard them speak. But the gracefulness of Carneades's oratory, whose ability was really greatest, and his reputation equal to it, gathered large and favourable audiences, and ere long filled, like a wind, all the city with the sound of it. So that it soon began to be told that a Greek, famous even to admiration, winning and carrying all before him, had impressed so strange a love upon the young men, that quitting all their pleasures and pastimes, they ran mad, as it were, after philosophy; which indeed much pleased the Romans in general; nor could they but with much pleasure see the youth receive so welcome the

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1The Oropians came from the town of Oropus in east central Greece. Sicyonians came from the city of Sicyon in southern Greece.
Greek literature, and frequent the company of learned men. But Cato, on the other side, seeing the passion for words flowing into the city, from the beginning took it ill, fearing lest the youth should be diverted that way, and so should prefer the glory of speaking well before that of arms and doing well. And when the fame of the philosophers increased in the city, and Caius Acilius, a person of distinction, at his own request, became their interpreter to the senate at their first audience, Cato resolved, under some specious pretence, to have all philosophers cleared out of the city; and, coming into the senate, blamed the magistrates for letting these deputies stay so long a time without being despatched, though they were persons that could easily persuade the people to what they pleased; that therefore in all haste something should be determined about their petition, that so they might go home again to their own schools, and declaim to the Greek children, and leave the Roman youth to be obedient, as hitherto, to their own laws and governors.

Yet he did this not out of any anger, as some think, to Carneades; but because he wholly despised philosophy, and out of a kind of pride scoffed at the Greek studies and literature; as, for example, he would say, that Socrates was a prating, seditious fellow, who did his best to tyrannise over his country, to undermine the ancient customs, and to entice and withdraw the citizens to opinions contrary to the laws. Ridiculing the school of Isocrates,2 he would add, that his scholars grew old men before they had done learning with him, as if they were to use their art and plead causes in the court of Minos in the next world. And to frighten his son from anything that was Greek, in a more vehement tone than became one of his age, he pronounced, as it were, with the voice of an oracle, that the Romans would certainly be destroyed when they began once to be infected with Greek literature; though time indeed has shown the vanity of this his prophecy; as, in truth, the city of Rome has risen to its highest fortune while entertaining Grecian learning. Nor had he an aversion only against the Greek philosophers, but the physicians also; for having, it seems, heard how Hippocrates, when the king of Persia sent for him, with offers of a fee of several talents, said, that he would never assist barbarians who were enemies of the Greeks; he affirmed, that this was now become a common oath taken by all physicians, and enjoined his son to have a care and avoid them.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why was Lucretius critical of religion?
2. According to Lucretius, why did people first begin to believe in gods? Compare his view to that of Critias on page 54.
3. What is Cicero's view on the nature of law and what conclusions does he derive from it?
4. Why does Cicero conclude that the sense of justice is common to all humans? What implication does he draw from this conclusion?
5. Why did Cato fear Carneades in particular and Greek thought in general?

4 Roman Slavery

Slavery was practiced in ancient times, in many lands and among most peoples. Although conditions might vary in detail from place to place, essentially a slave was considered legally to be a piece of property, not a person with normal citizen's
rights. Age, sex, skills, ethnic origin, demeanor, appearance, and personal character determined a slave’s value in the marketplace. The status of slave was usually hereditary, but a person might be enslaved for debt or as a penalty for crime. Pirates would kidnap and sell their captives as slaves. But the most common source of slaves was defeated people captured during wars. They were assigned to all kinds of work, and their labors were vital in sustaining the luxury and leisure of the Roman upper classes. Even families of modest fortunes could usually afford a slave to do domestic chores, to help farm, or to assist in the family’s business or craft.

Diodorus Siculus
SLAVES: TORMENT AND REVOLT

The Roman war machine created hundreds of thousands of slaves during the last centuries of the Republic and the early centuries of the imperial age. Under the Republic, the Romans were notably harsh toward slaves; until the full influence of Greek Stoic philosophy penetrated the governing class, little was done to protect them from the absolute power of their Roman masters. Diodorus Siculus, a Greek historian, describes the condition of Roman slaves toiling in silver and gold mines in Iberia (present-day Spain) and then tells of an uprising of slaves that lasted from 135 to 132 B.C.

THE ORDEAL OF SLAVES
IN THE MINES

... After the Romans had made themselves masters of Iberia, a multitude of Italians have swarmed to the mines and taken great wealth away with them, such was their greed. For they purchase a multitude of slaves whom they turn over to the overseers of the working of the mines; and these men, opening shafts in a number of places and digging deep into the ground, seek out the seams of earth which are rich in silver and gold; and not only do they go into the ground a great distance, but they also push their diggings many stades [measure equalling about 607 feet] in depth and run galleries off at every angle, turning this way and that, in this manner bringing up from the depths the ore which gives them the profit they are seeking...

But to continue with the mines, the slaves who are engaged in the working of them produce for their masters revenues in sums defying belief, but they themselves wear out their bodies both by day and by night in the diggings under the earth, dying in large numbers because of the exceptional hardships they endure. For no respite or pause is granted them in their labours, but compelled beneath blows of the overseers to endure the severity of their plight, they throw away their lives in this wretched manner, although certain of them who can endure it, by virtue of their bodily strength and their persevering souls, suffer such hardships over a long period; indeed death in their eyes is more to be desired than life, because of the magnitude of the hardships they must bear.

A SLAVE REVOLT IN SICILY

There was never a sedition of slaves so great as that which occurred in Sicily, whereby many cities met with grave calamities, innumerable men and women, together with their children, experienced the greatest misfortunes, and all the island was in danger of falling into the power of fugitive slaves. ...

... The Servile [slave] War broke out for the following reason. The Sicilians, having shot up in prosperity and acquired great wealth, began to
purchase a vast number of slaves, to whose bodies, as they were brought in droves from the slave markets, they at once applied marks and brands. The young men they used as cowherds, the others in such ways as they happened to be useful. But they treated them with a heavy hand in their service, and granted them the most meagre care, the bare minimum for food and clothing. . . .

The slaves, distressed by their hardships, and frequently outraged and beaten beyond all reason, could not endure their treatment. Getting together as opportunity offered, they discussed the possibility of revolt, until at last they put their plans into action. . . . The beginning of the whole revolt took place as follows.

There was a certain Damophilus of Enna [a city in central Sicily], a man of great wealth but insolent of manner; he had abused his slaves to excess, and his wife Megallis vied even with her husband in punishing the slaves and in her general inhumanity towards them. The slaves, reduced by this degrading treatment to the level of brutes, conspired to revolt and to murder their masters. Going to Eunus [a Syrian slave believed to be a seer and magician] they asked him whether their resolve had the favour of the gods. He, resorting to his usual mummery, promised them the favour of the gods, and soon persuaded them to act at once. Immediately, therefore, they brought together four hundred of their fellow slaves and, having armed themselves in such ways as opportunity permitted, they fell upon the city of Enna, with Eunus at their head and working his miracle of the flames of fire for their benefit. When they found their way into the houses they shed much blood, sparing not even suckling babes. Rather they tore them from the breast and dashed them to the ground, while as for their husbands—under their maidservants' very eyes—but words cannot tell the extent of their outrages and acts of lewdness! By now a great multitude of slaves from the city had joined them, who, after first demonstrating against their own masters their utter ruthlessness, then turned to the slaughter of others. When Eunus and his men learned that Damophilus and his wife were in the garden that lay near the city, they sent some of their band and dragged them off, both the man and his wife, fettered and with hands bound behind their backs, subjecting them to many outrages along the way. Only in the case of the couple's daughter were the slaves seen to show consideration throughout, and this was because of her kindly nature, in that to the extent of her power she was always compassionate and ready to succour the slaves. Thereby it was demonstrated that the others were treated as they were, not because of some "natural savagery of slaves," but rather in revenge for wrongs previously received. The men appointed to the task, having dragged Damophilus and Megallis into the city, as we said, brought them to the theatre, where the crowd of rebels had assembled. But when Damophilus attempted to devise a plea to get them off safe and was winning over many of the crowd with his words, Hermeias and Zeuxis, men bitterly disposed towards him, denounced him as a cheat, and without waiting for a formal trial by the assembly the one ran him through the chest with a sword, the other chopped off his head with an axe. Thereupon Eunus was chosen king, not for his manly courage or his ability as a military leader, but solely for his marvels and his setting of the revolt in motion. . . .

Established as the rebels' supreme commander, he called an assembly and put to death all the citizenry of Enna except for those who were skilled in the manufacture of arms: these he put in chains and assigned them to this task. He gave Megallis to the maidservants to deal with as they might wish; they subjected her to torture and threw her over a precipice. He himself murdered his own masters, Antigenes and Pytho. Having set a diadem upon his head, and arrayed himself in full royal style, he proclaimed his wife queen (she was a fellow Syrian and of the same city), and appointed to the royal council such men as seemed to be gifted with superior intelligence. . . .

. . . In three days Eunus had armed, as best he could, more than six thousand men, besides others in his train who had only axes and hatchets, or slings, or sickles, or fire-hardened stakes, or even kitchen spits; and he went about ravaging the countryside. Then, since he kept recruiting untold numbers of slaves, he ventured even to do battle with Roman generals, and on joining combat repeatedly overcame them with his
superior numbers, for he now had more than ten thousand soldiers.

Soon after, engaging in battle with a general arrived from Rome, Lucius Hypsaeus [the Roman governor], who had eight thousand Sicilian troops, the rebels were victorious, since they now numbered twenty thousand. Before long their band reached a total of two hundred thousand, and in numerous battles with the Romans they acquitted themselves well, and failed but seldom. As word of this was bruited about, a revolt of one hundred and fifty slaves, banded together, flared up in Rome, of more than a thousand in Attica, and of yet others in Delos [an island off the southeastern Greek coast] and many other places. But thanks to the speed with which forces were brought up and to the severity of their punitive measures, the magistrates of these communities at once disposed of the rebels and brought to their senses any who were wavering on the verge of revolt. In Sicily, however, the trouble grew. Cities were captured with all their inhabitants, and many armies were cut to pieces by the rebels, until Rupilius, the Roman commander, recovered Tauroremenium [Taormina] for the Romans by placing it under strict siege and confining the rebels under conditions of unspeakable duress and famine: conditions such that, beginning by eating the children, they progressed to the women, and did not altogether abstain even from eating one another . . .

Finally, after Sarapion, a Syrian, had betrayed the citadel, the general laid hands on all the runaway slaves in the city, whom, after torture, he threw over a cliff. From there he advanced to Enna, which he put under siege in much the same manner, bringing the rebels into extreme straits and frustrating their hopes . . . Rupilius captured this city also by betrayal, since its strength was impregnable to force of arms. Eu­nus, taking with him his bodyguards, a thou­sand strong, fled in unmanly fashion . . .

. . . He met such an end as befitted his knavery, and died at Morgantina [in central Sicily]. Thereupon Rupilius, traversing the whole of Sicily with a few picked troops, sooner than had been expected rid it of every nest of robbers.

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Appian of Alexandria

THE REVOLT OF SPARTACUS

In 73 B.C., gladiators led by Spartacus broke out of their barracks and were joined by tens of thousands of runaways. Spartacus aimed to escape from Italy to Gaul and Thrace, the homelands—Spartacus was a Thracian—of many slaves. The slave army, which grew to some 150,000, defeated Roman armies and devastated southern Italy before the superior might of Rome prevailed. Some six thousand of the defeated slaves were tortured and crucified on the road from Capua to Rome. The following account of the rebellion was written by Appian of Alexandria in the second century A.D.

In Italy, at this same time, Spartacus, a Thracian who had once fought against the Romans and after being taken prisoner and sold had become a gladiator in a troop which was kept to provide entertainments at Capua, persuaded about seventy of his fellows to risk their lives for freedom rather than for exhibition as a spectacle. With them, he overpowered their guards and escaped. Then he
equipped himself and his companions with staves and daggers seized from travellers and took refuge on Mount Vesuvius, where he allowed many runaway domestic slaves and some free farm hands to join him. With the gladiators Oenomaus and Crixus as his subordinates he plundered the nearby areas, and because he divided the spoils in equal shares his numbers quickly swelled. The first commander sent against him was Varinius Glaber, and the second Publius Valerius; instead of legionary forces they had anyone they could quickly conscript on the way, because the Romans did not yet class the affair as a war, but as a kind of raid akin to piracy, and they were defeated when they attacked him. Spartacus himself actually captured Varinius’ horse from under him; so nearly was a Roman general taken prisoner by a gladiator. After this, people flocked in still greater numbers to join Spartacus: his army now numbered 70,000 and he began to manufacture weapons and gather stores.

The government in Rome now despatched the consuls with two legions. Crixus, at the head of 3,000 men, was defeated and killed by one of them at Mount Garganus, with the loss of two-thirds of his force. Spartacus, who was eager to go through the Apennines to the Alpine regions, and then to Celtic lands from the Alps, was intercepted and prevented from escaping by the other consul, while his colleague conducted the pursuit. But Spartacus turned on each of them and defeated them separately. In the aftermath they retreated in confusion, while his colleague conducted the pursuit. But Spartacus turned on each of them and defeated them separately. In the aftermath they retreated in confusion, while his colleague conducted the pursuit. But Spartacus turned on each of them and defeated them separately. In the aftermath they retreated in confusion, while his colleague conducted the pursuit. But Spartacus turned on each of them and defeated them separately. 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wounded from the Roman army; so effective had their punishment been in altering their will to win. Spartacus, who was waiting for some cavalry that were on their way to him, no longer went into battle with his full force, but conducted many separate harassing operations against his besiegers; he made sudden and repeated sorties against them, set fire to bundles of wood which he had thrown into the ditches, and made their work difficult. He crucified a Roman prisoner in no-man's land to demonstrate to his own troops the fate awaiting them if they were defeated. When the government at Rome heard of the siege and contemplated the dishonour they would incur from a protracted war with gladiators, they appointed Pompeius, who had recently arrived from Spain, to an additional command in the field, in the belief that the task of dealing with Spartacus was now substantial and difficult. As a result of this appointment Crassus pressed on urgently with every means of attacking Spartacus, to stop Pompeius stealing his glory, while Spartacus, thinking to forestall Pompeius, invited Crassus to negotiate. When Crassus spurned the offer, Spartacus decided to make a desperate attempt, and with the cavalry which had by now arrived forced a way through the encircling fortifications with his whole army and retired towards Brundisium, with Crassus in pursuit. But when he discovered that Lucullus, who was on his way back from his victory over Mithridates, was there, he despaired of everything and, at the head of a still large force, joined battle with Crassus. The fight was long, and bitterly contested, since so many tens of thousands of men had no other hope. Spartacus himself was wounded by a spear-thrust in the thigh, but went down on one knee, held his shield in front of him, and fought off his attackers until he and a great number of his followers were encircled and fell. The rest of his army was already in disorder and was cut down in huge numbers; consequently their losses were not easy to estimate (though the Romans lost about 1,000 men), and Spartacus’ body was never found. Since there was still a very large number of fugitives from the battle in the mountains, Crassus proceeded against them. They formed themselves into four groups and kept up their resistance until there were only 6,000 survivors, who were taken prisoner and crucified all the way along the road from Rome to Capua.

**REVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. What was the character of slavery under the early Romans?
2. According to Diodorus Siculus, what was the impact of slavery on the moral character of both masters and slaves? Compare with that of Seneca on page 136.
3. Judging from Appian’s account, how would you describe Spartacus’ character?

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**5 Women in Republican Society**

The status of women in late republican Roman society was considerably better than that of Greek women during the classical age. Like Greek law, Roman law had originally placed each female under the jurisdiction of a male, the *paterfamilias* (literally, “family father”), but Roman women obtained some freedom from male control during the times of the late Republic and the early Empire. Although women never achieved full civil equality and they could not formally participate in the political institutions of Rome, they did eventually exercise much practical control over their own property and indirectly exercised political influence through their husbands, sons, and fathers.
Quintus Lucretius Vespillo
A FUNERAL EULOGY FOR A ROMAN WIFE

Documenting intimate relationships between Roman men and women is difficult because ordinary people were unlikely to write about such things. Although personal records are scant or now lost, glimpses have survived in the writings of historians and poets or as inscriptions on tombstones.

In the late Republic, it became more common for distinguished men to pronounce funeral eulogies for distinguished female as well as male members of their families. One such eulogy was composed by the ex-Consul Quintus Lucretius Vespillo for his wife Turia, who died about 8 B.C. Though marriages among persons of the higher social ranks were usually undertaken for political and economic considerations, clearly this couple had gone beyond such a formal alliance to achieve a most touching love.

Before the day fixed for our marriage, you were suddenly left an orphan, by the murder of your parents in the solitude of the country. . . .

Through your efforts chiefly, their death did not remain unavenged. . . .

In our day, marriages of such long duration, not dissolved by divorce, but terminated by death alone, are indeed rare. For our union was prolonged in unclouded happiness for forty-one years. Would that it had been my lot to put an end to this our good fortune and that I as the older—which was more just—had yielded to fate.

Why recall your inestimable qualities, your modesty, deference, affability, your amiable disposition, your faithful attendance to the household duties, your enlightened religion, your unassuming elegance, the modest simplicity and refinement of your manners? Need I speak of your attachment to your kindred, your affection for your family—when you respected my mother as you did your own parents and cared for her tomb as you did for that of your own mother and father,—you who share countless other virtues with Roman ladies most jealous of their fair name? These qualities which I claim for you are your own, equalled or excelled by but few; for the experience of men teaches us how rare they are.

With common prudence we have preserved all the patrimony which you received from your parents. Intrusting it all to me, you were not troubled with the care of increasing it; thus did we share the task of administering it, that I undertook to protect your fortune, and you to guard mine. . . .

You gave proof of your generosity not only towards several of your kin, but especially in your filial devotion. . . . You brought up in your own home, in the enjoyment of mutual benefits, some young girls of your kinship. And that these might attain to a station in life worthy of our family, you provided them with dowries. . . .

I owe you no less a debt than Cæsar Augustus [27 B.C.—A.D. 14, emperor of Rome] himself, for this my return from exile to my native land. For unless you had prepared the way for my safety, even Cæsar's promises of assistance had been of no avail. So I owe no less a debt to your loyal devotion than to the clemency of Cæsar.

Why shall I now conjure up the memory of our domestic counsels and plans stored away in the hidden recesses of the heart?—That, aroused by the sudden arrival of messages from you to a realization of the present and imminent perils, I was saved by your counsel? That
you suffered me not to be recklessly carried away
by a foolish rashness, or that, when bent on
more temperate plans, you provided for me a
safe retreat, having as sharers in your plans for
my safety, when an exile,—fraught with danger
as they were for you all,—your sister and her
husband.

Vespillo then relates what happened to his
wife when she begged his enemy M. Lepidus
to honor her husband's writ of pardon from
Octavian Caesar.

... Then prostrating yourself at his feet, he
not only did not raise you up,—but, dragged
along and abused as though a common slave,
your body all covered with bruises, yet with un
flinching steadfastness of purpose, you recalled
to him Caesar's edict (of pardon) and the letter of
felicitation on my return, that accompanied it.
Braving his taunts and suffering the most brutal
treatment, you denounced these cruelties pub
licly so that he (Lepidus) was branded as the au
thor of all my perils and misfortunes. And his
punishment was not long delayed.

Could such courage remain without effect?
Your unexampled patience furnished the occa
sion for Caesar's clemency, and, by guarding my
life, he branded the infamous and savage cruelty
(of the tyrant Lepidus).

When all the world was again at peace and the
Republic reestablished, peaceful and happy days
followed. We longed for children, which an envi
ous fate denied us. Had Fortune smiled on us in
this, what had been lacking to complete our hap
piness? But an adverse destiny put an end to our
hopes. . . . Disconsolate to see me without chil
ren . . . you wished to put an end to my chagrin
by proposing to me a divorce, offering to yield
the place to another spouse more fertile, with the
only intention of searching for and providing for
me a spouse worthy of our mutual affection,
whose children you assured me you would have
treated as your own.

I will admit that I was so irritated and
shocked by such a proposition that I had difficul
ty in restraining my anger and remaining
master of myself. You spoke of divorce before the
decree of fate [death] had forced us to separate,
and I could not comprehend how you could con
ceive of any reason why you, still living, should
not be my wife, you who during my exile had al
ways remained most faithful and loyal.

Would that our time of life had permitted our
union to have endured until I, the older, had
passed away—which was more just—and that
you might perform for me the last sad rites and
that I might have departed, leaving you behind,
with a daughter to replace me at your side.

By fate's decree your course was run before
mine. You left me the grief, the heart-ache, the
longing for you, the sad fate to live alone.

The conclusion of this discourse will be that
you have deserved all, and that I remain with
the chagrin of not being able to give you all.
Your wishes have always been my supreme law;
and whatever it will be permitted me to accord
them still, in this I shall not fail.

May the gods, the Manes [spirits of dead an
cestors, considered godlike], assure and protect
your repose!

REVIEW QUESTIONS
1. What does Vespillo's eulogy reveal about the virtues a Roman husband might
   expect in his wife? What duties were expected of a wife?
2. In your opinion, what was Turia's most commendable quality?
6 The Decline of the Republic

In 133 B.C. the Romans effectively controlled all the lands that touched the Mediterranean Sea. The old enemies of Rome, Carthage, and Macedonia had become Roman provinces; the Hellenistic kingdoms of Syria and Egypt were clients of Rome without effective power to challenge Roman hegemony. The Mediterranean Sea had become a "Roman lake."

Yet, at the very moment of its imperial supremacy, the internal order and institutions of the Roman Republic began to break down. The senatorial leaders, who had served Rome responsibly in its march to empire, no longer governed effectively. The ruling class engaged in shameless corruption in administering the provinces, resorted to bribery and force to maintain control over public offices, and failed to solve the deeply rooted problems that afflicted the state.

Triggering the Republic's downhill slide was an agricultural crisis that destroyed the small independent peasant.

Plutarch

TIBERIUS GRACCHUS

The wars of expansion had a disastrous effect on Roman agriculture. Hannibal's ravaging of Italian farmlands and the obligatory military service that kept peasants away from their fields for long periods left many small farms in near ruins. The importation of thousands of prisoners of war to work as slaves on large plantations also squeezed small farmers out of business. Sinking ever deeper into debt and poverty, many lost their lands and went to Rome, where lack of jobs condemned them to permanent poverty. The once sturdy and independent Roman farmer, who had done all that his country had asked of him, became part of a vast urban underclass—poor, embittered, and alienated.

Tiberius Gracchus (163–133 B.C.), a scion of one of Rome's most honored families, was distressed by this injustice. Moreover, he realized that small landowners were the backbone of the Roman army. Elected tribune (an office created in 493 B.C. to protect plebeian rights), Tiberius Gracchus in 133 B.C. proposed land reforms that the senatorial nobility regarded as a potential menace to their property. They also viewed Tiberius Gracchus as a threat to their political authority. The Roman nobility feared that this popular reformer was building a following among the commoners in order to undermine senatorial rule and that his real ambition was to subvert republican institutions and to become a tyrant, a one-man ruler. This fear was strengthened when Tiberius, in violation of constitutional custom, announced that he would seek reelection as tribune. Senatorial extremists killed Tiberius Gracchus and some three hundred of his followers. The Republic had entered an age of political violence that would eventually destroy it. (Tiberius' younger brother, Gaius, became tribune in 123 B.C. and suffered a fate similar to his brother's.) The following account of Tiberius Gracchus is by Plutarch, the second-century Greek biographer.
Of the territory which the Romans won in war from their neighbours, a part they sold, and a part they made common land, and assigned it for occupation to the poor and indigent among the citizens, on payment of a small rent into the public treasury. And when the rich began to offer larger rents and drove out the poor, a law was enacted forbidding the holding by one person of more than five hundred acres of land. For a short time this enactment gave a check to the rapacity of the rich, and was of assistance to the poor, who remained in their places on the land which they had rented and occupied the allotment which each had held from the outset. But later on the neighbouring rich men, by means of fictitious personages, transferred these rentals to themselves, and finally held most of the land openly in their own names. Then the poor, who had been ejected from their land, no longer showed themselves eager for military service, and neglected the bringing up of children, so that soon all Italy was conscious of a dearth of freemen, and was filled with gangs of foreign slaves, by whose aid the rich cultivated their estates, from which they had driven away the free citizens. An attempt was therefore made to rectify this evil, and by Caius Laelius the comrade of Scipio; but the men of influence opposed his measures, and he, fearing the disturbance which might ensue, desisted, and received the surname of Wise or Prudent [for the Latin word “sapiens” would seem to have either meaning]. Tiberius, however, on being elected tribune of the people, took the matter directly in hand. . . .

He did not, however, draw up his law by himself, but took counsel with the citizens who were foremost in virtue and reputation. . . .

. . . And it is thought that a law dealing with injustice and rapacity so great was never drawn up in milder and gentler terms. For men who ought to have been punished for their disobedience and to have surrendered with payment of a fine the land which they were illegally enjoying, these men it merely ordered to abandon their unjust acquisitions upon being paid their value, and to admit into ownership of them such citizens as needed assistance. But although the rectification of the wrong was so considerate, the people were satisfied to let bygones be bygones if they could be secure from such wrong in the future; the men of wealth and substance, however, were led by their greed to hate the law, and by their wrath and contentiousness to hate the law-giver, and tried to dissuade the people by alleging that Tiberius was introducing a re-distribution of land for the confusion of the body politic, and was stirring up a general revolution.

But they accomplished nothing; for Tiberius, striving to support a measure which was honourable and just with an eloquence that would have adorned even a meaner cause, was formidable and invincible, whenever, with the people crowding around the rostra [speaker’s platforms], he took his stand there and pleaded for the poor. “The wild beasts that roam over Italy,” he would say, “have every one of them a cave or lair to lurk in; but the men who fight and die for Italy enjoy the common air and light, indeed, but nothing else; houseless and homeless they wander about with their wives and children. And it is with lying lips that their emperors exhort the soldiers in their battles to defend sepulchres and shrines from the enemy; for not a man of them has an hereditary altar, not one of all these many Romans an ancestral tomb, but they fight and die to support others in wealth and luxury, and though they are styled masters of the world, they have not a single clod of earth that is their own.”

Such words as these, the product of a lofty spirit and genuine feeling, and falling upon the ears of a people profoundly moved and fully aroused to the speaker’s support, no adversary of Tiberius could successfully withstand.

1Caius Laelius Sapiens, a leading military hero in the Third Punic War and a close friend of Scipio Aemilianus, the conqueror of Carthage, attempted unsuccessfully to resettle the poor on public land.

2First, a commander, general, or captain in the army, later imperator meant “emperor.”
Cicero

JUSTIFYING CAESAR'S ASSASSINATION

In the century following the assassination of Tiberius Gracchus in 133 B.C., the Republic was torn by conspiracies to seize the state, civil wars, assassinations, mob violence, and confiscations of property by political opponents.

In 49 B.C., Julius Caesar (100-44 B.C.), a talented and ambitious commander, marched on Rome. After defeating the Senate's forces, he was appointed dictator for ten years. A creative statesman, Caesar introduced reforms to resolve the grievances of Romans and provincials. Some senators feared that Caesar aimed to establish a typical Hellenistic monarchy over Rome with himself as absolute king. The very word king was abhorrent to patriotic Romans, who gloried in their status as free citizens of a five-centuries-old republic. Finally, on the Ides (the fifteenth) of March, 44 B.C., Julius Caesar was slain by some sixty senators, who acted, they said, to restore the liberty of the Roman people. Their leaders were Marcus Junius Brutus (82-42 B.C.) and Gaius Cassius (d. 42 B.C.), both of whom Caesar had previously pardoned.

In the following reading from On Duties, Cicero, who was not one of the assassins, justifies the killing of Caesar.

Our tyrant deserved his death for having made an exception of the one thing that was the blackest crime of all. Why do we gather instances of petty crime—legacies criminally obtained and fraudulent buying and selling? Behold, here you have a man who was ambitious to be king of the Roman People and master of the whole world; and he achieved it! The man who maintains that such an ambition is morally right is a madman; for he justifies the destruction of law and liberty and thinks their hideous and detestable suppression glorious. But if anyone agrees that it is not morally right to be king in a state that once was free and that ought to be free now, and yet imagines that it is advantageous for him who can reach that position, with what remonstrance or rather with what appeal should I try to tear him away from so strange a delusion? For, oh ye immortal gods! can the most horrible and hideous of all murders—that of fatherland—bring advantage to anybody, even though he who has committed such a crime receives from his enslaved fellow-citizens the title of "Father of his Country"?

Sallust

MORAL DETERIORATION

In the dark days of the Republic after the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 B.C., the Roman politician and historian Sallust (Gaius Sallustius Crispus, 86–35 B.C.) reflected on the causes of the Republic's collapse. In his account of a failed coup d'état that occurred in 63 B.C., Sallust contrasted the virtues of the early Republic with the moral decline that set in after the destruction of Carthage. Having failed
to be elected consul in 63 B.C., Catiline, a Roman noble, organized a conspiracy to seize the state. The coup d'état was thwarted by the vigorous action of the consul Cicero, who arrested the known conspirators and had them executed. Catiline, who led an army against the forces loyal to the government, was defeated and killed.

In peace and war [in the early Republic], as I have said, virtue was held in high esteem. The closest unity prevailed, and avarice was a thing almost unknown. Justice and righteousness were upheld not so much by law as by natural instinct. They quarrelled and fought with their country's foes; between themselves the citizens contended only for honour. In making offerings to the gods they spared no expense; at home they lived frugally and never betrayed a friend. By combining boldness in war with fair dealing when peace was restored, they protected themselves and the state. There are convincing proofs of this. In time of war, soldiers were often punished for attacking against orders or for being slow to obey a signal of recall from battle, whereas few ever ventured to desert their standards or to give ground when hard pressed. In peace, they governed by conferring benefits on their subjects, not by intimidation; and when wronged they would rather pardon than seek vengeance.

Thus by hard work and just dealing the power of the state increased. Mighty kings were vanquished, savage tribes and huge nations were brought to their knees; and when Carthage, Rome's rival in her quest for empire, had been annihilated [in 146 B.C.], every land and sea lay open to her. It was then that fortune turned unkind and confounded all her enterprises. To the men who had so easily endured toil and peril, anxiety and adversity, the leisure and riches which are generally regarded as so desirable proved a burden and a curse. Growing love of money, and the lust for power which followed it, engendered every kind of evil. Avarice destroyed honour, integrity, and every other virtue, and instead taught men to be proud and cruel, to neglect religion, and to hold nothing too sacred to sell. Ambition tempted many to be false, to have one thought hidden in their hearts, another ready on their tongues, to become a man's friend or enemy not because they judged him worthy or unworthy but because they thought it would pay them, and to put on the semblance of virtues that they had not. At first these vices grew slowly and sometimes met with punishment; later on, when the disease had spread like a plague, Rome changed: her government, once so just and admirable, became harsh and unendurable.

Reflecting on the last stages of the Republic's decline, Sallust believed that men had learned a most dangerous lesson: that they could gain power and wealth through violence and corruption rather than through virtue and self-restraint.

Never in its history—it seems to me—had the empire of Rome been in such a miserable plight. From east to west all the world had been vanquished by her armies and obeyed her will; at home there was profound peace and abundance of wealth, which mortal men esteem the chiefest of blessings. Yet there were Roman citizens obstinately determined to destroy both themselves and their country. In spite of two senatorial decrees, not one man among all the conspirators was induced by the promise of reward to betray their plans, and not one deserted from Catiline's camp. A deadly moral contagion had infected all their minds. And this madness was not confined to those actually implicated in the plot. The whole of the lower orders, impatient for a new régime, looked with favour on Catiline's enterprise.* In this they only did what might have been expected of them. In every country paupers envy respectable citizens and make heroes of unprincipled characters, hating the established order of things and hankering after innovation; discontented with their own lot, they are bent on general upheaval. Turmoil and rebellion bring

*This surely cannot have been true. Sallust must be exaggerating the popular support for the conspiracy.
them carefree profit, since poverty has nothing to lose.

The city populace were especially eager to fling themselves into a revolutionary adventure. There were several reasons for this. To begin with, those who had made themselves conspicuous anywhere by vice and shameless audacity, those who had wasted their substance by disgraceful excesses, and those whom scandalous or criminal conduct had exiled from their homes—all these had poured into Rome till it was like a sewer. Many, remembering Sulla's victory, and seeing men who had served under him as common soldiers now risen to be senators, or so rich that they lived as luxuriously as kings, began to hope that they too, if they took up arms, might find victory a source of profit. Young men from the country, whose labour on the farms had barely kept them from starvation, had been attracted by the private and public doles available at Rome, and preferred an idle city life to such thankless toil. These, like all the rest, stood to gain by public calamities. It is no wonder, therefore, that these paupers, devoid of moral scruple and incited by ambitious hopes, should have held their country as cheap as they held themselves. Those also to whom Sulla's victory had brought disaster by the proscription of their parents, the confiscation of their property, and the curtailment of their civil rights, looked forward with no less sanguine expectations to what might result from the coming struggle. Moreover, all the factions opposed to the Senate would rather see the state embroiled than accept their own exclusion from political power.

Such was the evil condition by which, after an interval of some years, Rome was once more afflicted. After the restoration of the power of the tribunes in the consulship of Pompey and Crassus, this very important office was obtained by certain men whose youth intensified their natural aggressiveness. These tribunes began to rouse the mob by inveighing against the Senate, and then inflamed popular passion still further by handing out bribes and promises, whereby they won renown and influence for themselves. They were strenuously opposed by most of the nobility, who posed as defenders of the Senate but were really concerned to maintain their own privileged position. The whole truth—to put it in a word—is that although all disturbers of the peace in this period put forward specious pretexts, claiming either to be protecting the rights of the people or to be strengthening the authority of the Senate, this was mere pretence: in reality, every one of them was fighting for his personal aggrandizement. Lacking all self-restraint, they stopped at nothing to gain their ends, and both sides made ruthless use of any successes they won.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What factors created a socioeconomic class struggle in the late Roman Republic?
2. According to Plutarch, what was the reaction of the senatorial order to the reforms proposed by Tiberius Gracchus?
3. Why did Cicero consider Caesar guilty of "the blackest crime of all"?
4. To what virtues did Sallust attribute the greatness of Rome?
5. What vices did Sallust believe could ruin a great state? Does his analysis have any contemporary significance?

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1 Lucius Cornelius Sulla (c. 138-78 B.C.) was a successful politician and general, whose rivalry with another politician and general, Gaius Marius (c. 155-86 B.C.), led to civil war. After seizing Rome and massacring his opponents, Sulla made himself dictator and increased the power of the aristocratic senate, suppressing the office of tribune of the people. The latter had been used by Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, among others (see page 119), to better the condition of the poorer classes.

*In 70 B.C.*

2 Pompey (Gnaeus Pompeius, 106-48 B.C.) and Crassus (Marcus Licinius Crassus, c. 115-53 B.C.) held the office of consul in 55 B.C. In 59 B.C., together with Julius Caesar, they had formed a political alliance called a triumvirate (meaning "group of three men"), which dominated Roman government for the next decade.