CHAPTER 5

The Roman Empire

THE ROMAN COLOSSEUM. Rome's largest amphitheater, the Colosseum could seat some forty-five to fifty thousand spectators. (Art Resource, N.Y.)
In the chaotic years following Julius Caesar's assassination in 44 B.C., Octavian (Augustus) emerged victorious over his rivals, becoming the unchallenged ruler of Rome. Although eager for personal power, Augustus was by no means a self-seeking tyrant; he was a creative statesman who prevented the renewal of civil war that had plagued the Republic and introduced needed reforms in Italy and the provinces. His long reign, from 27 B.C. to A.D. 14, marks the beginning of the *Pax Romana*, the Roman Peace, which endured until A.D. 180.

The period of the *Pax Romana* was one of the finest in the ancient world. Revolts against Roman rule were few, and Roman legions ably defended the Empire's borders. The Mediterranean world had never enjoyed so many years of peace, effective government, and economic well-being. Stretching from Britain to the Arabian Desert and from the Danube River to the sands of the Sahara, the Roman Empire united some sixty million people. In many ways the Roman Empire was the fulfillment of the universalism and cosmopolitanism of the Hellenistic Age. The same law bound together Italians, Spaniards, North Africans, Greeks, Syrians, and other peoples. Although dissatisfaction was sometimes violently expressed and separatist tendencies persisted, notably in Judea and Gaul, people from diverse backgrounds viewed themselves as Romans even though they had never set foot in the capital city.

In the seventy years following Augustus' reign, political life was sometimes marred by conspiracies and assassinations, particularly after an emperor's death left the throne vacant. Marcus Cocceius Nerva, who reigned from A.D. 96 to 98, introduced a practice that led to orderly succession and gave Rome four exceptionally competent emperors. He adopted as his son and designated as his heir Trajan (Marcus Ulpius Traianus), a man of proven ability. From the accession of Nerva to the death of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus in A.D. 180, the Roman Empire was ruled by the "Five Good Emperors." Marcus Aurelius abandoned the use of adoption and allowed his son Commodus (Lucius Aelius Aurelius, A.D. 180–192) to succeed to the throne. An extravagant despot, Commodus was murdered in A.D. 192.

During the third century the Roman Empire suffered hard times, and the ordered civilization of the *Pax Romana* was shattered. The Empire was plunged into anarchy as generals vied for the throne. Taking advantage of the weakened border defenses, the barbarians (Germanic tribesmen) crossed the Danube frontier and pillaged Roman cities. Both civil war and barbarian attacks greatly disrupted the Roman economy, which even during good times suffered from basic weaknesses.

Two later emperors—Diocletian (G. Aurelius Valerius Diocletianus, A.D. 285–305) and Constantine (Flavius Valerius Constantinus,
A.D. 306-337)—tried to keep the Empire from dissolution by tightening control over the citizenry. Although heavy taxes, requisitioning of goods, and forced labor provided some stability, these measures also turned many citizens against the oppressive state. At the end of the fourth and the opening of the fifth century, several barbarian tribes poured into the weakened Empire in great numbers. In succeeding decades Germanic tribes overran Roman provinces and set up kingdoms on lands that had been Roman. The Roman Empire in the west fell; the eastern provinces, however, survived as the Byzantine Empire.

The history of the Roman Empire influenced Western civilization in many ways. From Latin, the language of Rome, came the Romance languages: French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Romanian. Roman law became the basis of the legal codes of most modern European states. Rome preserved Greek culture, the foundation of Western learning and aesthetics, and spread it to other lands. And Christianity, the religion of the West, was born in the Roman Empire.

1 The Imperial Office

The greatest achievement of Caesar Augustus (Octavian), grandnephew and adopted son of Julius Caesar, was undoubtedly the step-by-step building of a new constitutional structure for the Roman Empire. This political system, called by modern historians the Principate, has been described as a monarchy disguised as an oligarchical republic. The Roman antimonarchial tradition, nurtured for five centuries under the Republican regime, had contributed directly to Julius Caesar's assassination. Augustus was wise enough, as he created a stable central executive office for the Empire, to camouflage the monarchial reality of his regime by maintaining the outer forms of the old Republic's constitution.

Augustus' chief innovation was creating the office of Princeps (First Citizen), which combined a number of Republican offices and powers and placed them at the disposal of one man. Desiring to maintain the appearance of traditional republican government, he refused to be called king. The Senate gave him the semireligious and revered name Augustus (venerable). In effect, however, he was the first Roman emperor. He cultivated the support of the traditional constituents of the Roman state—the senatorial nobility, knights, and public contractors, residents of the capital, soldiers and veterans, and the wealthy and politically useful provincial subjects of Rome. At the time of his death in A.D. 14, Augustus successfully passed on his imperial office to his chosen heir, his adopted son Tiberius.
Augustus

THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE DIVINE AUGUSTUS

In *Res gestae divi Augusti* (The Achievements of the Divine Augustus), a document composed shortly before his death and left to be published with his will, Augustus gave an account of those achievements for which he wanted to be remembered. A careful reading reveals the image Augustus chose to promote to justify his emperorship. It also describes the many responsibilities of holders of that office.

I drove into exile the murderers of my father [Julius Caesar], avenging their crime through tribunals established by law; and afterwards, when they made war on the republic, I twice defeated them in battle.

I undertook many civil and foreign wars by land and sea throughout the world, and as victor I spared the lives of all citizens who asked for mercy. When foreign peoples could safely be pardoned I preferred to preserve rather than to exterminate them. The Roman citizens who took the soldier's oath of obedience to me numbered about 500,000. I settled rather more than 300,000 of these in colonies or sent them back to their home towns after their period of service; to all these I assigned lands or gave money as rewards for their military service.

The dictatorship was offered to me by both senate and people in my absence and when I was at Rome in the consulship of Marcus Marcellus and Lucius Arruntius, but I refused it. I did not decline in the great dearth of corn to undertake the charge of the corn-supply, which I so administered that within a few days I delivered the whole city from apprehension and immediate danger at my own cost and by my own efforts.

The senate and people of Rome agreed that I should be appointed supervisor of laws and morals without a colleague and with supreme power, but I would not accept any office inconsistent with the custom of our ancestors. The measures that the senate then desired me to take I carried out in virtue of my tribunician power.

To each member of the Roman plebs [common populace] I paid under my father's will 300 sesterces,1 and in my own name I gave them 400 each from the booty of war in my fifth consulship, and once again in my tenth consulship I paid out 400 sesterces as a largesse to each man from my own patrimony, and in my eleventh consulship I bought grain with my own money and distributed twelve rations apiece, and in the twelfth year of my tribunician power I gave every man 400 sesterces for the third time. These largesses of mine never reached fewer than 250,000 persons.

... I paid monetary rewards to soldiers whom I settled in their home towns after completion of their service, and on this account I expended about 400,000,000 sesterces.

Four times I assisted the treasury with my own money, so that I transferred to the administrators of the treasury 150,000,000 sesterces.

I restored the Capitol2 and the theatre of Pompey, both works at great expense without inscribing my own name on either. I restored

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1 Sesterces, during the reign of Augustus, were small coins of bronze, each worth one hundredth of a gold aureus, or a quarter of a silver denarius, the basic coin of the Roman monetary system. Brunt (editor of source) notes that a Roman legionary soldier of this period earned 900 sesterces a year, out of which the cost of uniform, food, and arms was deducted. A Roman whose assessed wealth came to at least 400,000 sesterces qualified to enter the order of knights; to be a senator required one million sesterces.

2 Here "Capitol" refers to the temple of Jupiter, patron of Rome, on the Capitoline Hill.
the channels of the aqueducts, which in several places were falling into disrepair through age, and I brought water from a new spring into the aqueduct called Marcia, doubling the supply. I completed the Forum Julium\(^3\) and the basilica between the temples of Castor and Saturn,\(^4\) works begun and almost finished by my father. . . .

I gave three gladiatorial games in my own name and five in that of my sons or grandsons; at these games some 10,000 men took part in combat. Twice in my own name and a third time in that of my grandson I presented to the people displays by athletes summoned from all parts. I produced shows in my own name four times and in place of other magistrates twenty-three times. . . . I gave beast-hunts of African beasts in my own name or in that of my sons and grandsons in the circus or forum or amphitheatere on twenty-six occasions, on which about 3,500 beasts were destroyed.

I made the sea peaceful and freed it of pirates. In that war I captured about 30,000 slaves who had escaped from their masters and taken up arms against the republic, and I handed them over to their masters for punishment.

I extended the territory of all those provinces of the Roman people on whose borders lay peoples not subject to our government. I brought peace to the Gallic and Spanish provinces as well as to Germany, throughout the area bordering on the [Atlantic] Ocean from Cadiz [in Spain] to the mouth of the Elbe [in northwestern Germany]. I secured the pacification of the Alps. . . . The Pannonian peoples [in western Hungary] . . . were conquered through the agency of Tiberius Nero\(^5\) who was then my stepson and legate; I brought them into the empire of the Roman people, and extended the frontier of Illyricum\(^6\) to the banks of the Danube. . . .

In my sixth and seventh consulships, after I had extinguished civil wars, and at a time when with universal consent I was in complete control of affairs, I transferred the republic from my power to the dominion of the senate and people of Rome. For this service of mine I was named Augustus by decree of the senate, and the door-posts of my house were publicly wreathed with bay leaves and a civic crown was fixed over my door and a golden shield was set in the Curia Julia,\(^7\) which, as attested by the inscription thereon, was given me by the senate and people of Rome on account of my courage, clemency, justice and piety. After this time I excelled all in influence, although I possessed no more official power than others who were my colleagues in the several magistracies.

In my thirteenth consulship the senate, the equestrian order and the whole people of Rome gave me the title of Father of my Country. . . .

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\(^3\)The Forum (Square) Julium was surrounded by a covered portico. Begun by Julius Caesar, it was finished by Augustus.

\(^4\)Saturn was a Roman agricultural god associated with the Greek god Cronus. Castor, brother of Pollux and Helen of Troy, was the son of Jupiter by a mortal. The twins Castor and Pollux were deified in Rome for having helped the Romans in a battle.

\(^5\)Tiberius Nero, Augustus’ adopted son and designated heir, reigned as emperor from A.D. 14 to 37.

\(^6\)Illyricum was a Roman province on the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea.

\(^7\)The Curia Julia, also begun by Julius Caesar and completed by Augustus, was a courthouse.

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Tacitus

THE IMPOSITION OF ONE-MAN RULE

Not all Romans accepted Augustus’ own evaluation of his achievements. In this reading, the Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus (c. A.D. 55–c. 117) described how Augustus seduced the Roman people into accepting monarchial rule.
[Augustus] seduced the army with bonuses, and his cheap food policy was successful bait for civilians. Indeed, he attracted everybody's goodwill by the enjoyable gift of peace. Then he gradually pushed ahead and absorbed the functions of the senate, the officials, and even the law. Opposition did not exist. War or judicial murder had disposed of all men of spirit. Upper-class survivors found that slavish obedience was the way to succeed, both politically and financially. They had profited from the revolution, and so now they liked the security of the existing arrangement better than the dangerous uncertainties of the old régime. Besides, the new order was popular in the provinces. There, government by Senate and People was looked upon sceptically as a matter of sparring dignitaries and extortionate officials. The legal system had provided no remedy against these, since it was wholly incapacitated by violence, favouritism, and—most of all—bribery.

To safeguard his domination Augustus made his sister's son Marcellus a priest and an aedile\(^1\)—in spite of his extreme youth—and single out Marcus Agrippa,\(^2\) a commoner but a first-rate soldier who had helped to win his victories, by the award of two consecutive consulships; after the death of Marcellus, Agrippa was chosen by Augustus as his son-in-law. Next the emperor had his stepsons Tiberius and Nero Drusus\(^3\) hailed publicly as victorious generals.

At this time there was no longer any fighting—except a war against the Germans. In the capital the situation was calm. The titles of officials remained the same. Actium\(^4\) had been won before the younger men were born. Even most of the older generation had come into a world of civil wars. Practically no one had ever seen truly Republican government. The country had been transformed, and there was nothing left of the fine old Roman character. Political equality was a thing of the past; all eyes watched for imperial commands.

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\(^1\)An aedile was a minor municipal magistrate, responsible for petty criminal cases, and for the supervision of markets and public games—gladiatorial combats and chariot races.

\(^2\)Marcus Agrippa (c. 63–12 B.C.), Augustus' son-in-law, was his closest associate and virtually co-emperor; he predeceased Augustus.

\(^3\)Nero Drusus (38–9 B.C.), one of Augustus' stepsons, was the father of Emperor Claudius (ruled A.D. 41–54).

\(^4\)The Battle of Actium, fought in the sea off west-central Greece, pitted forces of Antony and Cleopatra against those of Octavian (Augustus). Octavian's victory gave him sole control of the Roman Empire.

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**REVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Describe the functions of a Roman emperor as suggested by the career of Caesar Augustus.
2. What constituencies did Caesar Augustus have to serve?
3. How did Augustus disguise the monarchial character of his regime?

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**2 Imperial Culture**

The reign of Augustus marks the golden age of Latin literature. This outpouring of literary works stemmed in part from the patronage of authors by Augustus and other prominent Romans. Roman poets and dramatists used Greek models, just as Roman philosophers, mathematicians, scientists, doctors, and geographers did. Not surprisingly, writers of the Augustan Age often expressed strong patriotic sentiments and were extravagant in their praise of Augustus.
Virgil

THE AENEID

The poet Virgil (Publius Vergilius Maro, 70–19 B.C.) admired Augustus, who was his patron, for ending the civil wars and bringing order to the Roman world. Augustus urged Virgil to compose a grand opus that would glorify Rome's imperial achievement—the emperor knew that he would find an honored place in such a work. It took Virgil ten years to produce the Aeneid, which was not fully completed when he died. Augustus disobeyed Virgil's deathbed request that the manuscript be destroyed, and the patriotic poem became Rome's national epic.

The Aeneid was greatly influenced by Homer's Iliad and Odyssey (see Chapter 3). In The Iliad, Homer dealt with the conflict between the early Greeks and the Trojans. Roman legend held that a Trojan remnant led by Prince Aeneas, son of Venus (the goddess of love) and a mortal father, Anchises, escaped the sacking of Troy. (Caesar Augustus claimed descent from the goddess Venus through Aeneas.) In book six, Aeneas, escorted by the Sybil, prophetess and priestess of Apollo, descends to the underworld in order to reach his father. There his father's soul describes the illustrious future that will be Rome's.

... Turn your two eyes
This way and see this people, your own Romans.
Here is Caesar, and all the line of Iulus
[founder of the Julian family],
All who shall one day pass under the dome
Of the great sky: this is the man, this one,
Of whom so often you have heard the promise,
Caesar Augustus, son of the deified [Julius Caesar],
Who shall bring once again an Age of Gold
To Latium,¹ to the land where Saturn [Roman god] reigned
In early times. He will extend his power

Beyond the Garamants² and Indians,
Over far territories north and south

Others will cast more tenderly in bronze
Their breathing figures, I can well believe,
And bring more lifelike portraits out of marble;
Argue more eloquently, use the pointer
To trace the paths of heaven accurately
And accurately foretell the rising stars.
Roman, remember by your strength to rule
Earth's peoples—for your arts are to be these:
To pacify, to impose the rule of law,
To spare the conquered, battle down the proud.

¹Latium was the ancient country in which stood the towns of Lavinium and Alba Longa; Rome was established in that region and became its most significant city.

²The Garamants (Garamantes) were a warlike nomadic people living in the northwestern Sahara.

Ovid

THE ART OF LOVE

The greatest of the Latin elegists during the golden age was Publius Ovidius Naso or Ovid (43 B.C.-A.D. 17). Unlike Virgil, Ovid did not experience the civil wars
during his adult years. Consequently, he was less inclined to praise the Augustan peace. He was married three times and supposedly had a mistress, Corinna, to whom he wrote Amores (love letters). As a result of his marriages and affairs, Ovid’s poetry reveals a preference for romance and humor and a fondness for love and sensual themes.

Ovid is best remembered for his advice to lovers contained in his most famous work—Ars Amatoria (Art of Love). Written when Ovid was fifty years old, the poem concerns itself with the art of seduction and is written in a worldly-wise yet witty manner. It is divided into three books; the first and second tell how to attract and retain a woman who is the object of a man’s desire.

Women can always be caught; that’s the first rule of the game.
Sooner would birds in the spring be silent, or locusts in August,
Sooner would hounds run away when the fierce rabbits pursue,
Than would a woman, well-wooed, refuse to succumb to a lover;
She’ll make you think she means No! while she is planning her Yes!
Love on the sly [stolen love] delights men; it is equally pleasing to women.
Men are poor at pretense; women can hide their desire.
It’s a convention, no more [than that], that men play the part of pursuer.
Women don’t run after us; mousetraps don’t run after mice.

Play the role of the lover, give the impression of heartache;
No matter what your device, that you must make her believe,
Nor is it very hard—they all of them think that they’re lovely,
Even the ugliest hag dotes on her beauty’s appeal.
More than once, you will find, the pretense ends in conviction,
More than once the romance proves, after all, to be true.
So, girls, don’t be too harsh on the men you suspect of pretending:
Some day the butterfly, Truth, breaks from the lying cocoon.
Flattery works on the mind as the waves on the bank of a river:
Praise her face and her hair; praise her fingers and toes.
Tears are a good thing, too; they move the most adamant natures.
Let her, if possible, see tears on your cheeks, in your eyes.
This is not easy: sometimes the eyes will not stream at your bidding.
What can be done about this?—get your hands wet, and apply.
What about sending her poems? A very difficult question.
Poems, I am sorry to say, aren’t worth so much in this town.
Oh, they are praised, to be sure; but the girls want something more costly.
Even illiterates please, if they have money to burn.
Ours is a Golden Age, and gold can purchase you honors,
All the “Golden Mean” means is, gold is the end.
Homer himself, if he came attended by all of the Muses,
With no scrip in his purse, would be kicked out of the house.
There are a few, very few, bright girls with a real education,
Some (perhaps) here and there, willing to give it a try.
So, go ahead, praise both: the worth of the song matters little.
Just so you make it sound lovely while reading aloud.
Whether or not she can tell one kind of verse from another,
If there’s a line in her praise she will assume, “It’s a gift!”
Juvenal

THE SATIRES

Juvenal (Decimus Junius Juvenalis, c. A.D. 60–c. 131), Rome's greatest satirical poet, found much fault with the Rome of his day. The streets were crowded, noisy, and unsafe; bullies itched to fight; criminals stole and murdered; the poor suffered even more than other Romans. The following excerpt from *The Satires* is Juvenal's account of the underside of life in Rome.

... A man's word
Is believed just to the extent of the wealth in his coffers stored.
Though he swear on all the altars from here to Samothrace,¹
A poor man isn't believed... . .

Anyway, a poor man's the butt of jokes if
his cloak has a rip
Or is dirty, if his toga is slightly soiled, if
a strip
Of leather is split in his shoes and gapes,
if coarse thread shows
New stitches patching not one but many holes. Of the woes
Of unhappy poverty, none is more difficult to bear
Than that it heaps men with ridicule.
Says an usher, "How dare
You sit there? Get out of the rows reserved for knights to share... . ."

... What poor man ever inherits
A fortune or gets appointed as clerk to a magistrate?
Long ago the penniless Romans ought to have staged a great Mass walkout. It's no easy job for a man to advance
When his talents are balked by his impoverished circumstance,

But in Rome it's harder than elsewhere... . .
Here most of the sick die off because they get no sleep
(But the sickness is brought on by the undigested heap
Of sour food in their burning stomachs), for what rented flat
Allows you to sleep? Only rich men in this city have that.
There lies the root of the illness—carts rumbling in narrow streets
And cursing drivers stalled in a traffic jam—it defeats
All hope of rest... . .

... Though we hurry, we merely crawl;
We're blocked by a surging mass ahead, a pushing wall
Of people behind. A man jabs me, elbowing through, one socks
A chair pole against me, one cracks my skull with a beam, one knocks
A wine cask against my ear. My legs are caked with splashing
Mud, from all sides the weight of enormous feet comes smashing
On mine, and a soldier stamps his hobnails through to my sole... . .

... a piece of a pot
Falls down on my head, how often a broken vessel is shot

¹Samothrace, an island in the northern Aegean Sea, is best known today as the place where the famous statue of the Winged Victory (Nike) was found.
From the upper windows, with what a force it strikes and dints
The cobblestones!...

The besotted bully, denied his chance in the shabby bars
Of killing somebody, suffers torments, itching to fight.
Like Achilles\(^2\) bemoaning his friend, he tosses about all night,
Now flat on his face, now on his back—there's no way at all
He can rest, for some men can't sleep till after a bloody brawl.
But however rash and hot with youth and flushed with wine,
He avoids the noble whose crimson cloak and long double line
Of guards with brass lamps and torches show they're too much to handle.
But for me, whom the moon escorts, or the feeble light of a candle

\(^2\)Achilles, the Greeks' most formidable warrior in Homer's *Iliad*, was torn by grief when his best friend Patroclus was killed by the Trojans.

Whose wick I husband and trim—he has no respect for me.
Now hear how the pitiful fight begins—if a fight it be,

When he delivers the punches and I am beaten to pulp.
He blocks my way and tells me to stop. I stop, with a gulp—
What else can you do when a madman stronger than you attacks?...

This is the poor man's freedom: having been soundly mauled
And cut to pieces by fists, he begs and prays, half dead,
To be allowed to go home with a few teeth still in his head.

But these aren't your only terrors. For you can never restrain
The criminal element. Lock up your house, put bolt and chain
On your shop, but when all's quiet, someone will rob you or he'll
Be a cutthroat perhaps and do you in quickly with cold steel....

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**Quintilian**

**THE EDUCATION OF THE ORATOR**

Quintilian (Marcus Fabius Quintilianus, c. A.D. 35–c. 90), the leading Roman rhetorician of his day, was born in Spain and educated in Rome. After many years of teaching the children of the Roman elite, Quintilian wrote a systematic treatise on education, *The Education of the Orator*, which provided shrewd insights into the learning process and emphasized the making of well-rounded, cultured orators and good citizens as important goals for the instructor. Excerpts from this work are given below.

My aim, then, is the education of the perfect orator. The first essential for such an one is that he should be a good man, and consequently we demand of him not merely the possession of exceptional gifts of speech, but of all the excellences of character as well. For I will not admit
that the principles of upright and honourable living should, as some have held, be regarded as the peculiar concern of philosophy. The man who can really play his part as a citizen and is capable of meeting the demands both of public and private business, the man who can guide a state by his counsels, give it a firm basis by his legislation and purge its vices by his decisions as a judge, is assuredly no other than the orator of our quest. . . .

I prefer that a boy should begin with Greek, because Latin, being in general use, will be picked up by him whether we will or no; while the fact that Latin learning is derived from Greek is a further reason for his being first instructed in the latter. . . . The study of Latin ought therefore to follow at no great distance and in a short time proceed side by side with Greek. The result will be that, as soon as we begin to give equal attention to both languages, neither will prove a hindrance to the other.

Some hold that boys should not be taught to read till they are seven years old, that being the earliest age at which they can derive profit from instruction and endure the strain of learning. . . . Those however who hold that a child's mind should not be allowed to lie fallow for a moment are wiser. Why, again, since children are capable of moral training, should they not be capable of literary education? I am well aware that during the whole period of which I am speaking we can expect scarcely the same amount of progress that one year will effect afterwards. . . .

I am not however so blind to differences of age as to think that the very young should be forced on prematurely or given real work to do. Above all things we must take care that the child, who is not yet old enough to love his studies, does not come to hate them and dread the bitterness which he has once tasted, even when the years of infancy are left behind. His studies must be made an amusement: he must be questioned and praised and taught to rejoice when he has done well; sometimes, too, when he refuses instruction, it should be given to some other to excite his envy, at times also he must be engaged in competition and should be allowed to believe himself successful more often than not, while he should be encouraged to do his best by such rewards as may appeal to his tender years. . . .

. . . It is the master's duty as well, if he is engaged on the task of training unformed minds and prefers practical utility to a more ambitious programme, not to burden his pupils at once with tasks to which their strength is unequal, but to curb his energies and refrain from talking over the heads of his audience. Vessels with narrow mouths will not receive liquids if too much be poured into them at a time, but are easily filled if the liquid is admitted in a gentle stream or, it may be, drop by drop; similarly you must consider how much a child's mind is capable of receiving: the things which are beyond their grasp will not enter their minds, which have not opened out sufficiently to take them in. . . .

Still, all our pupils will require some relaxation, not merely because there is nothing in this world that can stand continued strain . . . but because study depends on the good will of the student; a quality that cannot be secured by compulsion. Consequently if restored and refreshed by a holiday they will bring greater energy to their learning and approach their work with greater spirit of a kind that will not submit to be driven. I approve of play in the young; it is a sign of a lively disposition; nor will you ever lead me to believe that a boy who is gloomy and in a continual state of depression is ever likely to show alertness of mind in his work, lacking as he does the impulse most natural to boys of his age. Such relaxation must not however be unlimited: otherwise the refusal to give a holiday will make boys hate their work, while excessive indulgence will accustom them to idleness. There are moreover certain games which have an education value for boys. . . . Games too reveal character in the most natural way, at least that is so if the teacher will bear in mind that there is no child so young as to be unable to learn to distinguish between right and wrong, and that the character is best moulded, when it is still guiltless of deceit and most susceptible to instruc-
tion: for once a bad habit has become engrained, it is easier to break than bend. There must be no delay, then, in warning a boy that his actions must be unselfish, honest, self-controlled, and we must never forget the words of Virgil, “So strong is custom formed in early years.”

I disapprove of flogging, although it is the regular custom and meets with the acquiescence of Chrysippus,¹ because... it is a disgraceful form of punishment and fit only for slaves, and is in any case an insult, as you will realise if you imagine its infliction at a later age.... And though you may compel a child with blows, what are you to do with him when he is a young man no longer amenable to such threats and confronted with tasks of far greater difficulty? Moreover when children are beaten, pain or fear frequently have results of which it is not pleasant to speak and which are likely subsequently to be a source of shame, a shame which unnerves and depresses the mind and leads the child to shun and loathe the light.... I will content myself with saying that children are helpless and easily victimised, and that therefore no one should be given unlimited power over them. I will now proceed to describe the subjects in which the boy must be trained, if he is to become an orator, and to indicate the age at which each should be commenced.

As soon as the boy has learned to read and write without difficulty, it is the turn for the teacher of literature. My words apply equally to Greek and Latin masters, though I prefer that a start should be made with a Greek: in either case the method is the same. This profession may be most briefly considered under two heads, the art of speaking correctly and the interpretation of the poets; but there is more beneath the surface than meets the eye. For the art of writing is combined with that of speaking, and correct reading precedes interpretation, while in each of these cases criticism has its work to perform.... Nor is it sufficient to have read the poets only; every kind of writer must be carefully studied, not merely for the subject matter, but for the vocabulary; for words often acquire authority from their use by a particular author. Nor can such training be regarded as complete if it stop short of music, for the teacher of literature has to speak of metre and rhythm: nor again if he be ignorant of astronomy, can he understand the poets; for they, to mention no further points, frequently give their indications of time by reference to the rising and setting of the stars. Ignorance of philosophy is an equal drawback, since there are numerous passages in almost every poem based on the most intricate questions of natural philosophy.... No small powers of eloquence also are required to enable the teacher to speak appropriately and fluently on the various points which have just been mentioned. For this reason those who criticise the art of teaching literature as trivial and lacking in substance put themselves out of court. Unless the foundations of oratory are well and truly laid by the teaching of literature, the superstructure will collapse. The study of literature is a necessity for boys and the delight of old age, the sweet companion of our privacy and the sole branch of study which has more solid substance than display.

¹Chrysippus (280–207 B.C.) was considered second only to Zeno among the Stoic philosophers.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why are some poems a valuable source for historians?
2. According to Virgil, what was Rome’s destiny and the basis of its greatness?
3. Which of Ovid’s suggestions do you consider very clever? very foolish?
4. According to Juvenal, what were some of the hazards of urban life in ancient Rome?
5. What methods did Quintilian favor and oppose in the teaching of children?
3 Roman Stoicism

Stoicism, the leading school of thought in the Hellenistic world, appealed to Roman thinkers. Founded by Zeno of Citium (335–267 B.C.), who established an academy in Athens, Stoicism taught that universal principles, or natural law, underlay the universe. Natural laws applied to all people and were grasped through reason, which was common to all human beings. Stoicism gave expression to the universalism of the Hellenistic Age; it held that all people—Greek and barbarian, free and slave, rich and poor—were essentially equal, for they all had the capacity to reason and were all governed by the same universal laws. Living according to the law of reason that pervades the cosmos provides the individual with the inner fortitude to deal with life’s misfortunes, said the Stoics; it is the path to virtue. In the tradition of Socrates, the Stoics regarded people as morally self-sufficient, capable of regulating their own lives. The Romans valued the Stoic emphasis on self-discipline and the molding of character according to worthy standards. The Stoic doctrine of natural law that applied to all peoples harmonized with the requirements of Rome’s multinational Empire.

Seneca

THE MORAL EPISTLES

Lucius Annaeus Seneca (4 B.C.–A.D. 65) was born at Cordoba (Cordova), Spain, into a highly educated family: his father, for example, was a distinguished rhetorician, politician, and historian. Sent to school in Rome, Seneca studied rhetoric and philosophy, particularly Stoicism. From A.D. 54 to 62, he was a key advisor to the emperor Nero (A.D. 54–68). Later the notoriously unstable emperor accused Seneca of participating in a conspiracy against him and compelled him to commit suicide.

In traditional Stoic fashion, Seneca held that individuals belong to two commonwealths, the city where they are born and the kingdom of humanity, which is worldwide. In serving this superior commonwealth, individuals become aware of their moral potential. The virtuous tone of Seneca’s writings (they had a great appeal to Christians) contrasted with the realities of his life, for Seneca used his political influence for self-enrichment and condoned murder to enhance his political power. Despite this discrepancy between Seneca’s words and deeds, he was one of the few Romans to denounce the gladiatorial events as barbaric, and he urged humane treatment of slaves.

The sentiments expressed in these two moral essays, written in the form of epistles (letters) to his friend Lucilius, a prominent Roman civil servant, reveal Seneca’s Stoic humanitarianism.
ON GLADIATORS

But nothing is more harmful to a good disposition than to while the time away at some public show. I return from such entertainments more greedy, more dissipated, nay, even more cruel and inhuman. By chance I fell in with a public show at midday, expecting some sport, buffoonery [clownish amusement], or other relaxation, now that the spectators had seen their fill of human gore. All the bloody deeds of the morning were mere mercy: for now, all trifling apart, they commit downright murder. The combatants have nothing with which to shield the body; they are exposed to every stroke of their antagonist; and every stroke is a wound. And this some prefer to their fighting well armored! There is no helmet or shield to repel the blow; no defense, no art—for these are but so many balks and delays of death. In the morning men are exposed to lions and bears; at noon gladiators who fight to the death are ordered out against one another, and the conqueror is detained for another slaughter. Death alone puts an end to this business. "Kill, burn, scourge," is all they cry. "Why is he so afraid of the sword's point? Why is he so timorous to kill? Why does he not die more manfully?" They are urged on with floggings if they refuse to fight and are obliged to give and take wounds with an open breast. They are called upon to cut one another's throats.

ON SLAVERY

It by no means displeases me, Lucilius, to hear from those who confer with you, that you live on friendly terms with your slaves. This attests to your good sense and education. Are they slaves? No, they are men; they are comrades; they are humble friends. Nay, rather fellow-servants, if you reflect on the equal power of Fortune over both you and them. I therefore laugh at those who think it scandalous for a gentleman to permit, at times, his servant to sit down with him at supper. Why should he not? It is only proud custom that has ordained that a master dine surrounded by at least a dozen slaves and stuff himself, while the poor servants are not allowed to open their lips, even to speak. The slightest murmur is restrained by a rod; nor are mere accidents excused, such as a cough, a sneeze, or a hiccup. Silence interrupted by a word is sure to be punished severely. Thus the slaves must stand, perhaps the whole night, without taking a bit of food or drink or speaking a word. Whence it often happens that such as are not allowed to speak before their masters will speak disrespectfully of them behind their backs. In contrast, those slaves who have been allowed not only to speak before their masters, but sometimes with them, whose mouths were not sewed up, have been ready to incur the most imminent danger, even to the sacrificing of their lives, for their master's safety. Slaves are not naturally our enemies, but we make them such.

I pass by the more cruel and inhuman actions, wherein we treat slaves not as men but as beasts of burden. . . .

Were you to consider, that he whom you call your slave, is sprung from the same origin, enjoys the same climate, breathes the same air, and is subject to the same condition of life and death as yourself, you will think it possible to see him as a free-born person, as he is free to see you as a slave. After the fall of Marius,1 how many people born of the most splendid parentage and not unjustly expecting a senatorial office for their exploits in war, did fortune cut down? She made one a shepherd, another a caretaker of a country cottage. Can you now despise the man whose fortune is such, into which, while you despise it, you may fall?

I will not discuss at length the treatment of slaves towards whom we behave cruelly and arrogantly. But this is the essence of what I would prescribe: treat your inferiors as you would have a superior treat you. As often as you think of the power that you have over a slave,

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1 Gaius Marius (c. 155–86 B.C.) was a famous Roman general.
reflect on the power that your master has over you. But you say, "I have no master." Be it so. The world goes well with you at present; it may not do so always. You may one day be a slave yourself. Do you know at what time Hecuba became a slave, or Croesus, or the mother of Darius, or Plato, or Diogenes? Live therefore courteously with your slave; talk with him, dine with him.

2In The Iliad, Hecuba, the wife of Priam, king of Troy, was enslaved by the Greeks after their conquest of Troy.
3Croesus, king of Lydia in Asia Minor from 560 to 546 B.C., was famous for his wealth, but died in slavery after losing his kingdom in battle.

### Marcus Aurelius

**MEDITATIONS**

Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (A.D. 161–180) was the last of the great Roman Stoics and the last of the so-called Five Good Emperors. His death brought an end to the Pax Romana. A gentle and peace-loving man, Marcus Aurelius was not spared violence and personal misfortune during his reign. Troops returning from Syria brought back a plague, which spread throughout the Empire. Marcus hurried to the east to quell an uprising by the commander of the forces in Asia, who declared himself emperor. Although the mutiny quickly died out, Marcus Aurelius' wife perished on the journey. Four of his five sons died young, and his fifth son, Commodus, who succeeded to the throne, was a tyrant.

For the last fourteen years of his life, Marcus Aurelius had to deal with tribesmen from north of the Danube who broke through the defenses and plundered what is now the Balkan peninsula. Marcus took personal command of the hard-pressed legions on the frontier. During this period he wrote the Meditations, twelve books containing his reflections on duty, human dignity, the self-sufficiency of reason, and other themes traditionally discussed by Stoic thinkers. Written in Greek, this deeply personal expression of Stoic philosophy has been called "the highest ethical product of the ancient mind." Excerpts from the Meditations follow.

### BOOK TWO

Begin each day by telling yourself: Today I shall be meeting with interference, ingratitude, insolence, disloyalty, ill-will, and selfishness—all of them due to the offenders' ignorance of what is good or evil. But for my part I have long perceived the nature of good and its nobility, the nature of evil and its meanness, and also the nature of the [evildoer] himself, who is my brother (not in the physical sense, but as a fellow-
creature similarly endowed with reason and a share of the divine); therefore none of those things can injure me, for nobody can implicate me in what is degrading. Neither can I be angry with my brother or fall foul of him; for he and I were born to work together, like a man's two hands, feet, or eyelids, or like the upper and lower rows of his teeth. To obstruct each other is against Nature's law—and what is irritation or aversion but a form of obstruction?

A little flesh, a little breath, and a Reason to rule all—that is myself... As one already on the threshold of death, think nothing of the first—of its viscid [thick] blood, its bones, its web of nerves and veins and arteries. The breath, too; what is that? A whiff of wind; and not even the same wind, but every moment puffed out and drawn in anew. But the third, the Reason, the master—on this you must concentrate. Now that your hairs are grey, let it play the part of a slave no more, twitching puppetwise at every pull of self-interest; and cease to fume at destiny by ever grumbling at today or lamenting over tomorrow....

Hour by hour resolve firmly, like a Roman and a man, to do what comes to hand with correct and natural dignity, and with humanity, independence, and justice. Allow your mind freedom from all other considerations. This you can do, if you will approach each action as though it were your last, dismissing the wayward thought, the emotional recoil from the commands of reason, the desire to create an impression, the admiration of self, the discontent with your lot. See how little a man needs to master, for his days to flow on in quietness and piety: he has but to observe these few counsels, and the gods will ask nothing more.

BOOK THREE

If mortal life can offer you anything better than justice and truth, self-control and courage—that is, peace of mind in the evident conformity of your actions to the laws of reason, and peace of mind under the visitations of a destiny you cannot control—if, I say, you can discern any higher ideal, why, turn to it with your whole soul, and rejoice in the prize you have found....

Never value the advantages derived from anything involving breach of faith, loss of self-respect, hatred, suspicion, or execration of others, insincerity, or the desire for something which has to be veiled and curtained. One whose chief regard is for his own mind, and for the divinity within him and the service of its goodness, will strike no poses, utter no complaints, and crave neither for solitude nor yet for a crowd.... No other care has he in life but to keep his mind from straying into paths incompatible with those of an intelligent and social being....

BOOK FOUR

Men seek for seclusion in the wilderness, by the seashore, or in the mountains—a dream you have cherished only too fondly yourself. But such fancies are wholly unworthy of a philosopher, since at any moment you choose you can retire within yourself. Nowhere can man find a quieter or more untroubled retreat than in his own soul; above all, he who possesses resources in himself, which he need only contemplate to secure immediate ease of mind—the ease that is but another word for a well-ordered spirit. Avail yourself often, then, of this retirement, and so continually renew yourself. Make your rules of life brief, yet so as to embrace the fundamentals; recurrence to them will then suffice to remove all vexation, and send you back without fretting to the duties to which you must return....

If the power of thought is universal among mankind, so likewise is the possession of reason, making us rational creatures. It follows, therefore, that this reason speaks no less universally to us all with its "thou shalt" or "thou shalt not." So then there is a world-law; which in turn means that we are all fellow-citizens and share a common citizenship, and that the world is a single city. Is there any other common citizenship that can be claimed by all humanity? And it is from this world-poliity that mind, reason, and law themselves derive. If not, whence else? As the earthy portion of me has its origin from...
Part One The Ancient World

earth, the watery from a different element, my breath from one source and my hot and fiery parts from another of their own elsewhere (for nothing comes from nothing, or can return to nothing), so too there must be an origin for the mind...

BOOK FIVE

At day's first light have in readiness, against disinclination to leave your bed, the thought that "I am rising for the work of man." Must I grumble at setting out to do what I was born for, and for the sake of which I have been brought into the world? Is this the purpose of my creation, to lie here under the blankets and keep myself warm? "Ah, but it is a great deal more pleasant!" Was it for pleasure, then, that you were born, and not for work, not for effort? Look at the plants, the sparrows, ants, spiders, bees, all busy at their own tasks, each doing his part towards a coherent world-order; and will you refuse man's share of the work, instead of being prompt to carry out Nature's bidding? "Yes, but one must have some repose as well." Granted; but repose has its limits set by nature, in the same way as food and drink have; and you overstep these limits, you go beyond the point of sufficiency; while on the other hand, when action is in question, you stop short of what you could well achieve.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What virtues did Stoics believe should guide human actions?
2. What Stoic philosophic principle influenced Seneca's view of the proper relationship between slaves and masters?
3. According to Marcus Aurelius, what was the purpose of human life?
4. How did a Stoic seek to achieve tranquillity of mind and spirit?

4 Roman Law

One of the most significant legacies of Rome to Western civilization is the system of law developed by the Romans over many centuries. Roman law evolved into three distinct types: the civil law (ius civile), which was peculiar to the Roman state and applicable only to its citizens; the law of nature (ius naturale), an unchanging, everlasting, universal law that was binding on all persons by reason of their common humanity; the law of nations (ius gentium), an international law governing the relationship between Romans and other peoples. The law of nations was fashioned by Roman jurists as Rome came into contact with and conquered other cultures; it incorporated elements from Roman civil law and the legal traditions of the other peoples, particularly the Greeks. Roman jurists held that the law of nations accorded with natural law: that is, it rested upon principles of reason that were common to all humans.
Justinian

CORPUS IURIS CIVILIS

The principles of Roman law are drawn from many sources, from the statutes of emperors, edicts of magistrates, and commentaries of learned jurists, such as Ulpian (Domitius Ulpianus, d. A.D. 228), Gaius (c. A.D. 130–180), and Julius Paulus (second–third century A.D.). These past laws and judicial commentaries were culled and selectively incorporated in the Corpus Iuris Civilis, the imperial code drawn up by order of Emperor Justinian (A.D. 527–565) and promulgated in A.D. 534. It has been said that next to the Bible, no book has had a deeper impact on Western civilization than Justinian’s code. It became the official body of laws of the eastern Roman (or Byzantine) Empire through the Middle Ages and was gradually reintroduced into western Europe in the twelfth century. Roman law continued in the postmedieval world and formed the basis of common law in all Western lands except England and its dependencies, where its influence was less marked. Some principles of Roman law are readily recognizable in today’s legal systems, as the following excerpts indicate.

- The Divine Trajan stated in a Rescript addressed to Julius Frontonius that anyone who is absent should not be convicted of crime. Likewise, no one should be convicted on suspicion; for the Divine Trajan stated in a Rescript to Assiduus Severus: “It is better to permit the crime of a guilty person to go unpunished than to condemn one who is innocent.”
- No one suffers a penalty for merely thinking.
- Proof is incumbent upon the party who affirms a fact, not upon him who denies it.
- In inflicting penalties, the age and inexperience of the guilty party must always be taken into account.
- Nothing is so opposed to consent, which is the basis of bona fide contracts, as force and fear; and to approve anything of this kind is contrary to good morals.
- The crime or the punishment of a father can place no stigma upon his son; for each one is subjected to fate in accordance with his conduct, and no one is appointed the successor of the crime of another.
- Women are excluded from all civil or public employments; therefore they cannot be judges, or perform the duties of magistrates, or bring suits in court, or become sureties for others, or act as attorneys.
- A minor, also, must abstain from all civil employments.
- Every person should support his own offspring, and anyone who thinks that he can abandon his child shall be subjected to the penalty prescribed by law. We do not give any right to masters or to patrons to recover children who have been abandoned, when children exposed by them, as it were, to death, have been rescued through motives of pity, for no one can say that a child whom he has left to perish belongs to him.
- The authority and observance of long-established custom should not be treated with contempt, but it should not prevail to the extent of overcoming either reason or law.

Not all principles of Roman law have been incorporated into the legal codes of modern societies. One example is the use of torture to test the testimony of witnesses, particularly those of low social status. In those lands where Roman law remained in effect,
torture was legal until the eighteenth century, when it was purged from European judicial systems.

- Torture is employed in the detection of crime, but a beginning should not be made with its application; and, therefore, in the first place, evidence should be resorted to, and if the party is liable to suspicion, he shall be compelled by torture to reveal his accomplices and crimes.
- Where several culprits are implicated in the same offence, they should be examined in such a way as to begin with the one who appears to be more timid than the others, and of tender age.
- Torture is not applied in [financial] matters, unless when an investigation is made with reference to property belonging to an estate; other things, however, are established by oath, or by the evidence of witnesses.
- Torture should not be inflicted upon a minor under fourteen years of age, as the Divine Pius stated in a Rescript addressed to Caecilius Jubentinus.
- All persons, however, without exception, shall be tortured in a case of high treason which has reference to princes, if their testimony is necessary, and circumstances demand it.

**REVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. What is the *ius naturale* and what are its implications when applied to particular legal cases?
2. What is the *ius gentium* and what were its origins?
3. What provisions of Justinian's code are reflected in present-day legal systems in Europe and America?
4. Why are both torture and slavery in the modern world seen as incompatible with the basic premises of natural law?
5 Provincial Administration

During the Pax Romana, Roman officials governed territories that extended from Britain, Spain, and present-day Morocco in the west to Mesopotamia and Armenia in the east; from the Rhine and Danube rivers in western and central Europe to the Sahara in northern Africa. The Empire reached its greatest geographic extent under Emperor Trajan (A.D. 98–117), who conquered Dacia (heartland of modern Romania). The basic unit of political administration, the city, met most of the daily political and social needs of the population. Above the level of the city governments were the Roman provincial authorities, led by governors usually appointed by and responsible directly to the emperor. The senate's role in governing the provinces gradually declined, and the burdens of ruling the vast territory fell largely on the emperor. This enormous task proved daunting for all but the most energetic and conscientious emperors.

CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN PLINY THE YOUNGER AND EMPEROR TRAJAN

A series of letters exchanged between Emperor Trajan and Gaius Plinius Caecilius (Pliny the Younger, c. A.D. 61–c. 112), governor of the Roman province of Bithynia, located in the northwestern corner of Asia Minor, reveal the many problems Roman provincial officials faced. Given the highly personal character of the imperial office, provincial officials like Pliny, even when urged not to do so, tended to refer most problems directly to the emperor for policy guidance.

XXXIII

Pliny to the Emperor Trajan

While I was visiting another part of the province, a widespread fire broke out in Nicomedia1 which destroyed many private houses and also two public buildings (the Elder Citizens' Club and the Temple of Isis)2 although a road runs between them. It was fanned by the strong breeze in the early stages, but it would not have spread so far but for the apathy of the populace; for it is generally agreed that people stood watching the disaster without bestirring themselves to do anything to stop it. Apart from this, there is not a single fire engine anywhere in the town, not a bucket nor any apparatus for fighting a fire. These will now be provided on my instructions.

Will you, Sir, consider whether you think a company of firemen might be formed, limited to 150 members? I will see that no one shall be admitted who is not genuinely a fireman, and that the privileges granted shall not be abused: it will not be difficult to keep such small numbers under observation.

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1Nicomedia was the capital city of the province of Bithynia (northern Turkey today).
2Isis, the chief Egyptian goddess and consort of Osiris, was widely worshiped throughout the Roman Empire.
personal attention to my request for his advancement; if you place any confidence in my advice you will bestow on him your favour. He will not fail to earn further promotion in whatever post you place him. I am sparing in my praises because I trust that his sincerity, integrity and application are well known to you already from the high offices he has held in Rome beneath your own eyes, as well as from his service in the army under your command.

I still feel that I have not given adequate expression to the warmth of my affection, and so once more I pray you, Sir, most urgently, to permit me to rejoice as soon as possible in the due promotion of my quaestor—that is to say, in my own advancement in his person.

LXV

Pliny to the Emperor Trajan

A very considerable question, Sir, in which the whole province is interested, has been lately started, concerning the state and maintenance of what are called foundlings [abandoned infants]. I have examined the rulings of former Princes upon this head, but not finding any thing in them either particular or general relating to the Bithynians, I thought it necessary to apply to you for your directions. For in a point which requires the special interposition of your authority, I could not content myself with following precedents.

An edict of the Emperor Augustus (as pretended) was read to me, concerning Asia*; also a letter from Vespasian to the Lacedaemonians, and another from Titus to the same, with one likewise from him to the Achaeans. Also a letter from Domitian to the Proconsuls Avidius Nigrinus and Armenius Brochus, and another to the Lacedaemonians: but I have not transmitted them to you, as well because they were ill-copied (and some of them, too, of doubtful authority) as because I imagine the true copies are preserved in your Record Office.

LXVI

Trajan to Pliny

The question concerning free-born persons who have been exposed [abandoned] as infants and reared in slavery by those who took them up, has been frequently discussed; but I do not find in the archives of the Princes my predecessors, any general regulation upon this head, extending to all the provinces. There are, indeed, letters of Domitian to Avidius Nigrinus and Armenius Brochus, which perhaps ought to be observed; but Bithynia is not comprehended in the provinces therein mentioned. I am of opinion therefore, that those who desire emancipation upon this ground should not be debarred from publicly asserting their freedom, nor be obliged to purchase it by repaying the cost of their maintenance.

* i.e., the Roman province so called.

REVIEW QUESTION

1. What kinds of political and administrative problems in the Roman Empire are suggested by the letters of Trajan and Pliny?
6 The Roman Peace

The two-hundred-year period from Augustus' assumption of sole power in 27 B.C. to the death of Emperor Marcus Aurelius in A.D. 180 marks the Pax Romana, the Roman Peace. Roman poets and officials extolled the Roman achievement—the creation of a well-run world-state that brought order and stability to the different nations of the Mediterranean world.

Aelius Aristides

THE ROMAN ORATION

THE BLESSINGS OF THE PAX ROMANA

In the following reading, Aelius Aristides (A.D. 117-187) a Greek intellectual, glowingly praises the Pax Romana in an oration that was probably delivered in Rome. In the tradition of Roman orators, Aristides used hyperbole and exaggeration. Nevertheless, the oration does capture the universalism and cosmopolitanism that characterized the Roman Empire.

"If one considers the vast extent of your empire he must be amazed that so small a fraction of it rules the world, but when he beholds the city and its spaciousness it is not astonishing that all the habitable world is ruled by such a capital. . . . Your possessions equal the sun's course. . . . You do not rule within fixed boundaries, nor can anyone dictate the limits of your sway. . . . Whatever any people produces can be found here, at all times and in abundance. . . . Egypt, Sicily, and the civilized part of Africa are your farms; ships are continually coming and going. . . .

"Vast as it is, your empire is more remarkable for its thoroughness than its scope: there are no dissident or rebellious enclaves. . . . The whole world prays in unison that your empire may endure forever.

"Governors sent out to cities and peoples each rule their charges, but in their relations to each other they are equally subjects. The principal difference between governors and their charges is this—they demonstrate the proper way to be a subject. So great is their reverence for the great Ruler [the emperor], who administers all things. Him they believe to know their business better than they themselves do, and hence they respect and heed him more than one would a master overseeing a task and giving orders. No one is so self-assured that he can remain unmoved upon hearing the emperor's name; he rises in prayer and adoration and utters a twofold prayer—to the gods for the Ruler, and to the Ruler for himself. And if the governors are in the least doubt concerning the justice of claims or suits of the governed, public or private, they send to the Ruler for instructions at once and await his reply, as a chorus awaits its trainer's directions. Hence the Ruler need not exhaust himself by traveling to various parts to settle matters in person. It is easy for him to abide in his place and manage the world through letters; these arrive almost as soon as written, as if borne on wings.

"But the most marvelous and admirable achievement of all, and the one deserving our fullest gratitude, is this. . . . You alone of the
imperial powers of history rule over men who are free. You have not assigned this or that region to this nabob or that mogul; no people has been turned over as a domestic and bound holding—to a man not himself free. But just as citizens in an individual city might designate magistrates, so you, whose city is the whole world, appoint governors to protect and provide for the governed, as if they were elective, not to lord it over their charges. As a result, so far from disputing the office as if it were their own, governors make way for their successors readily when their term is up, and may not even await their coming. Appeals to a higher jurisdiction are as easy as appeals from parish to county. . . .

"But the most notable and praiseworthy feature of all, a thing unparalleled, is your magnanimous conception of citizenship. All of your subjects (and this implies the whole world) you have divided into two parts: the better endowed and more virile, wherever they may be, you have granted citizenship and even kinship; the rest you govern as obedient subjects. Neither the seas nor expanse of land bars citizenship; Asia and Europe are not differentiated. Careers are open to talent. . . . Rich and poor find contentment and profit in your system; there is no other way of life. Your polity is a single and all-embracing harmony. . . .

"You have not put walls around your city, as if you were hiding it or avoiding your subjects; to do so you considered ignoble and inconsistent with your principles, as if a master should show fear of his slaves. You did not overlook walls, however, but placed them round the empire, not the city. The splendid and distant walls you erected are worthy of you; to men within their circuit they are visible, but it requires a journey of months and years from the city to see them. Beyond the outermost ring of the civilized world you drew a second circle, larger in radius and easier to defend, like the outer fortifications of a city. Here you built walls and established cities in diverse parts. The cities you filled with colonists; you introduced arts and crafts and established an orderly culture. . . . Your military organization makes all others childish. Your soldiers and officers you train to prevail not only over the enemy but over themselves. The soldier lives under discipline daily, and none ever deserts the post assigned him.

"You alone are, so to speak, natural rulers. Your predecessors were masters and slaves in turn; as rulers they were counterfeiters, and reversed their positions like players in a ball game. . . . You have measured out the world, bridged rivers, cut roads through mountains, filled the wastes with posting stations, introduced orderly and refined modes of life. . . .

"Be all gods and their offspring invoked to grant that this empire and this city flourish forever and never cease until stones float upon the sea and trees forbear to sprout in the springtide. May the great Ruler and his sons be preserved to administer all things well."

Tacitus
THE OTHER SIDE OF THE PAX ROMANA

Not all peoples in the Roman Empire welcomed Roman rule. Some nations, particularly Jews, Gauls, Britons, and Egyptians, saw themselves as victims of brutal domination and rose in revolt against their Roman governors. Our knowledge of their motives and grievances is usually secondhand, being found in the records of their enemies—the Romans and their collaborators.

Cornelius Tacitus, Roman historian and orator (see also page 128), wrote a bi-
ography of his father-in-law, Agricola (A.D. 40–93), a general who completed the conquest of northern Britain. In this work, Tacitus describes the character and motives of Roman imperialism from a Briton’s viewpoint. The speech that follows is uttered by Calgacus, a leader of the northern, or Caledonian, tribes during the Roman campaign in the years A.D. 77–83. The ideas expressed, however, are those that Tacitus, a well-informed Roman of high social rank, believed the victims of Roman military conquest held about their situation.

"Whenever I consider why we are fighting and how we have reached this crisis, I have a strong sense that this day of your splendid rally may mean the dawn of liberty for the whole of Britain. You have mustered to a man, and to a man you are free. There are no lands behind us, and even the sea is menaced by the Roman fleet. The clash of battle—the hero’s glory—has become the safest refuge for the coward. Battles against Rome have been lost and won before—but never without hope; we were always there in reserve. We, the choice flower of Britain, were treasured in her most secret places. Out of sight of subject shores, we kept even our eyes free from the defilement of tyranny. We, the last men on earth, the last of the free, have been shielded till to-day by the very remoteness and the seclusion for which we are famed. We have enjoyed the impressiveness of the unknown. But today the boundary of Britain is exposed; beyond us lies no nation, nothing but waves and rocks and the Romans, more deadly still than they, for you find in them an arrogance which no reasonable submission can elude. Brigands of the world, they have exhausted the land by their indiscriminate plunder, and now they ransack the sea. The wealth of an enemy excites their [greed], his poverty their lust of power. East and West have failed to glut their maw [stomach]. They are unique in being as violently tempted to attack the poor as the wealthy. Robbery, butchery, rapine, the liars call Empire; they create a desolation and call it peace.

"We instinctively love our children and our kinsmen above all else. These are torn from us by conscription to slave in other lands. Our wives and sisters, even if they are not raped by Roman enemies, are seduced by them in the guise of guests and friends. Our goods and fortunes are ground down to pay tribute, our land and its harvest to supply corn, our bodies and hands to build roads through woods and swamps—all under blows and insults. Slaves, born into slavery, once sold, get their keep from their masters. But as for Britain, never a day passes but she pays and feeds her enslavers. In a private household it is the latest arrival who is always the butt of his fellow-slaves; so, in this establishment, where all the world have long been slaves, it is we, the cheap new acquisitions, who are picked out for extirpation. You see, we have no fertile lands, no mines, no harbours, which we might be spared to work. Courage and martial spirit we have, but the master does not relish them in the subject. Even our remoteness and seclusion, while they protect, expose us to suspicion. Abandon, then, all hope of mercy and at last take courage, whether it is life or honour that you hold most dear. . . . Let us, then, uncorrupted, unconquered as we are, ready to fight for freedom but never to repent failure, prove at the first clash of arms what heroes Caledonia\(^1\) has been holding in reserve. . . . Or can you seriously think that those Gauls or Germans\(^2\)—and, to our bitter shame, many Britons too!—are bound to Rome by genuine loyalty or love? They may be lending their life-blood to foreign 

\(^1\)Caledonia was the name given by the Romans to the section of Scotland north of what is now the Firth of Forth.

\(^2\)The Gauls consisted of several groups of tribes in modern Belgium, the Netherlands, France, and Switzerland. The Germans (Germani) who had been conquered by Rome lived north of the Gauls, just south of the Rhine; the rest of the Germani occupied a large territory north and east of the Rhine.
tyrants, but they were enemies of Rome much longer than they have been her slaves. Apprehension and terror are weak bonds of affection; once break them, and, where fear ends, hatred will begin. All that can goad men to victory is on our side. In the ranks of our very enemies we shall find hands to help us. They have nothing in reserve that need alarm us—only forts without garrisons, colonies of grey-beards, towns sick and distracted between rebel subjects and tyrant masters. Here before us is their general, here his army; behind are the tribute, the mines and all the other whips to scourge slaves. Whether you are to endure these for ever or take summary vengeance, this field must decide. On, then, into action and, as you go, think of those that went before you and of those that shall come after."

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. According to Aelius Aristides, how did Roman rule benefit the peoples of the Roman Empire?

2. What views about Rome do you think Tacitus wishes to express through the speech he attributes to Calgacus the Briton?

7 Third-Century Crisis

An extravagant tyrant, Marcus Aurelius' son Commodus (Lucius Aelius Aurelius, A.D. 180–192) was an unworthy successor, and his reign marks the close of the Pax Romana. For the next hundred years the Empire was burdened by economic, political, and military crises. For much of the third century, barbarian tribesmen broke through the northern frontier defenses and plundered the Balkans, Greece, Asia Minor, northern Italy, Gaul, and Spain; the Persians invaded the Empire from the east. The legions, consisting predominantly of the least Romanized provincials, used their weapons to place their own commanders on the throne. During the ensuing civil wars, the soldiers looted the towns as if they were an invading army. Rome was drifting into anarchy.

The devastations by barbarians and the soldiers wrecked the economy, which was further damaged by crushing taxes and requisitions of goods and by inflation caused by debased coinage. Everywhere, people were fleeing from plundering barbarians or soldiers, from warring armies, and from government officials who extorted taxes and goods and services from an already overburdened population.
CARACALLA'S EXTORTIONS

Chapter 5 The Roman Empire

Dio Cassius

The reign (A.D. 211–217) of Caracalla provides an early example of the crushing demands imposed by the state on its citizenry. The following account comes from the Roman History of Dio Cassius.

[Caracalla] was fond of spending money upon the soldiers, great numbers of whom he kept in attendance upon him, alleging one excuse after another and one war after another; but he made it his business to strip, despoil, and grind down all the rest of mankind, and the senators by no means least. In the first place, there were the gold crowns that he was repeatedly demanding, on the constant pretext that he had conquered some enemy or other; and I am not referring, either, to the actual manufacture of the crowns—for what does that amount to?—but to the vast amount of money constantly being given under that name by the cities for the customary “crowning,” as it is called, of the emperors. Then there were the provisions that we were required to furnish in great quantities on all occasions, and this without receiving any remuneration and sometimes actually at additional cost to ourselves—all of which supplies he either bestowed upon the soldiers or else peddled out; and there were the gifts which he demanded from the wealthy citizens and from the various communities; and the taxes, both the new ones which he promulgated and the ten per cent. tax that he instituted in place of the five per cent. tax that he instituted in place of the five per cent. tax applying to the emancipation of slaves, to bequests, and to all legacies. . . . But apart from all these burdens, we were also compelled to build at our own expense all sorts of houses for him whenever he set out from Rome, and costly lodgings in the middle of even the very shortest journeys; yet he not only never lived in them, but in some cases was not destined even to see them. Moreover, we constructed amphitheatres and race-courses wherever he spent the winter or expected to spend it, all without receiving any contribution from him; and they were all promptly demolished, the sole reason for their being built in the first place being, apparently, that we might become impoverished.

The emperor himself kept spending the money upon the soldiers, as we have said, and upon wild beasts and horses; for he was for ever killing vast numbers of animals, both wild and domesticated, forcing us to furnish most of them, though he did buy a few. One day he slew a hundred boars at one time with his own hands. . . . In everything he was very hot-headed and very fickle, and he furthermore possessed the craftiness of his mother and the Syrians, to which race she belonged. He would appoint some freedman or other wealthy person to be director of the games in order that the man might spend money in this way also; and he would salute the spectators with his whip from the arena below and beg for gold pieces like a performer of the lowest class. . . . To such an extent was the entire world, so far as it owned his sway, devastated throughout his whole reign, that on one occasion the Romans at a horse-race shouted in unison this, among other things: “We shall do the living to death,” that we may bury the dead.” Indeed, he often used to say: “Nobody in the world should have money but me; and I want it to bestow upon the soldiers.” Once when Julia [Domna, his mother] chided him for spending vast sums upon them and said, “There is no longer any source of revenue, either just or unjust, left to us,” he replied, exhibiting his sword, “Be of good cheer, mother: for as long as we have this, we shall not run short of money.” Moreover to those who flattered him he distributed both money and goods.

*Or . . . “We are stripping the living.”
PETITION TO EMPEROR PHILIP

A petition presented about A.D. 245 to Emperor Philip (M. Julius Philippus, 244-249) reveals the desperation of the peasants.

We who flee as suppliants to the refuge of your divinity are the entire population of your most sacred estate. We are suffering extortion and illegal exactions beyond all reason at the hands of those who ought to preserve the public welfare... Military commanders, soldiers, and powerful and influential men in the city and your officials... swoop down upon us, take us away from our work, requisition our plow oxen, and illegally exact what is not due them. As a result we are suffering extraordinary injustice by this extortion. We wrote about all this to your majesty, Augustus, when you held the prefecture of the Praetorian Guard... and how your divinity was moved the rescript [emperor's official answer] quoted herewith makes clear: "We have transmitted the content of your petition to the governor, who will see to it that there is no further cause for complaint." But inasmuch as this rescript has brought us no aid, it has resulted that we are still suffering throughout the countryside illegal exactions of what is not owing, as certain parties assault us and trample upon us unjustly, and we are still suffering extraordinary extortion at the hands of the officials, and our resources have been exhausted and the estates deserted.

1The title Augustus was originally given by the senate to Octavian, the first emperor. It later became the title of all his successors.

2The Praetorian Guard, commanded by a prefect (praefectus), was the official troop of imperial bodyguards.

Herodian

EXTORTIONS OF MAXIMINUS

Raised to imperial office by his own rebellious troops, Maximinus (A.D. 235-238) was desperate for money to pay the soldiers and to run the state. He therefore robbed the urban middle class. This account of Maximinus comes from Herodian of Antioch (c. A.D. 165-c. 255), a Syrian Greek who served in the imperial bureaucracy. He wrote a history of the Roman Empire that covered the time from the death of Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 180) to the accession of Gordian III (A.D. 238).

... Other battles took place in which Maximinus won praise for his personal participation, for fighting with his own hands, and for being in every conflict the best man on the field... He threatened (and was determined) to defeat and subjugate the German nations as far as the ocean. This is the kind of military man the emperor was, and his actions would have added to his reputation if he had not been much too ruthless and severe toward his associates and subjects. What profit was there in killing barbarians when greater slaughter occurred in Rome and
the provinces? Or in carrying off booty captured from the enemy when he robbed his fellow countrymen of all their property? ... Anyone who was merely summoned into court by an in­former was immediately judged guilty, and left with all his property confiscated. It was thus possible every day to see men who yesterday had been rich, today reduced to paupers, so great was the avarice of the tyrant, who pretended to be insuring a continuous supply of money for the soldiers. The emperor's ears were always open to slanderous charges, and he spared neither age nor position. He arrested on slight and trivial charges many men who had governed provinces and commanded armies, who had won the honor of a consulship, or had gained fame by military victories. ... After insulting and torturing these prisoners, he condemned them to exile or death.

As long as his actions affected only individuals and the calamities suffered were wholly private, the people of the cities and provinces were not particularly concerned with what the emperor was doing. Unpleasant things which happen to those who seem to be fortunate or wealthy are not only a matter of indifference to the mob, but they often bring pleasure to mean and malicious men, who envy the powerful and the prosperous. After Maximinus had impoverished most of the distinguished men and confiscated their estates, which he considered small and insignificant and not sufficient for his purposes, he turned to the public treasuries; all the funds which had been collected for the citizens' welfare or for gifts, all the funds being held in reserve for shows or festivals, he transferred to his own personal fortune. The offerings which belonged to the temples, the statues of the gods, the tokens of honor of the heroes, the decorations on public buildings, the adornments of the city, in short, any material suitable for making coins, he handed over to the mints. But what especially irked the people and aroused public indignation was the fact that, although no fighting was going on and no enemy was under arms anywhere, Rome appeared to be a city under siege. Some citizens, with angry shaking of fists, set guards around the temples, preferring to die before the altars than to stand by and see their country ravaged. From that time on, particularly in the cities and the provinces, the hearts of the people were filled with rage. The soldiers too were disgusted with his activities, for their relatives and fellow citizens complained that Maximinus was acting solely for the benefit of the military.

For these reasons, and justifiably, the people were aroused to hatred and thoughts of revolt.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How did the Roman emperors abuse their power?
2. What evidence do these documents provide of the citizens' growing hate for the Roman state?

8 The Demise of Rome

The conquest of the western provinces of the Roman Empire by various Germanic tribes in the fifth century A.D. was made easier by the apathy and frequent collaboration of Roman citizens themselves. Many Romans had grown to hate the bureaucratic oppressors who crushed them with constant demands for excessive and unfair taxes, forced labor on government projects, extortion, and all the evils of a police state. In some areas of Gaul and Spain, peasants had revolted and
successfully defended their homes and farms against the Roman authorities. When such barbarians as the Visigoths, Vandals, and Ostrogoths entered the region, many Romans welcomed them as liberators and cooperated with them in establishing their new kingdoms.

Ammianus Marcellinus

THE BATTLE OF ADRIANOPLE

The problem of guarding the frontier became increasingly urgent in the last part of the fourth century. The Huns, a nomadic people from central Asia, swept across the plains of Russia with their armed cavalry. They subdued the Ostrogoths, a Germanic tribe in Ukraine, and put pressure on the Germanic Visigoths, who had migrated along the Danube into what is now Romania.

Encamped on the Danube, the Visigoths, desperate to escape from the Huns, petitioned the eastern emperor Valens to let them take refuge within the Roman Empire. Not eager to resort to force to keep the Goths out and hoping that they would prove useful allies against other enemies, Valens permitted them to cross the Danube. But after imperial officials plundered their possessions and carried off some into slavery, the Goths took up arms against the Empire.

In 378, the Goths and the Romans fought each other in a historic battle at Adrianople. The Visigoths routed the Roman forces, killing or capturing perhaps as much as two-thirds of the Roman army. Emperor Valens perished in what was Rome’s worst defeat since Cannae in the war with Hannibal. The Visigoths were on Roman territory to stay. The battle of Adrianople signified that Rome could no longer defend its borders. The Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus (A.D. 330–c. 400) describes this historic battle in the following reading.

... In the meantime a report spread extensively through the nations of the Goths, that a race of men, hitherto unknown, had suddenly descended like a whirlwind from the lofty mountains, as if they had risen from some secret recess of the earth, and were ravaging and destroying everything which came in their way. And then the greater part of the population... resolved to flee and to seek a home remote from all knowledge of the [Huns]; and after a long deliberation where to fix their abode, they resolved that a retreat into Thrace [within the Roman Empire] was the most suitable for these two reasons: first of all, because it is a district most fertile in grass; and also because by the great breadth of the Danube, it is wholly separated from the [Huns].

[Valens] sent forth several officers to bring this ferocious people and their waggons into our territory. And such great pains were taken to gratify this nation which was destined to overthrow the empire of Rome, that not one was left behind, not even of those who were stricken with mortal disease. Moreover, having obtained permission of the emperor to cross the Danube and to cultivate some districts in Thrace, they crossed the stream day and night, without ceasing, embarking in troops on board ships and rafts, and canoes made of the hollow trunks of trees, in which enterprise, as the Danube is the most difficult of all rivers to navigate, and was at that time swollen with continual rains, a great many were drowned, who, because they were too numerous for the vessels, tried to swim across, and in spite of all their exertions were swept away by the stream.

In this way, through the turbulent zeal of violent people, the ruin of the Roman empire was
brought on. This, at all events, is neither obscure nor uncertain, that the unhappy officers who were intrusted with the charge of conducting the multitude of the barbarians across the river, though they repeatedly endeavoured to calculate their numbers, at last abandoned the attempt as hopeless; and the man who would wish to ascertain the number might as well (as the most illustrious of poets [Virgil] says) attempt to count the waves in the African sea, or the grains of sand tossed about by the zephyr.

But after the innumerable multitudes of different nations, diffused over all our provinces, and spreading themselves over the vast expanse of our plains, filled all the champaign country and all the mountain ranges . . . the emperor assigned them a temporary provision for their immediate support, and ordered lands to be assigned them to cultivate.

At that time the defences of our provinces were much exposed and the armies of barbarians spread over them like the lava of Mount Etna.

The barbarians, like beasts who had broken loose from their cages poured unrestrainedly over the vast extent of country.

When the Goths proved to be enemies of Rome, the eastern emperor Valens led his army to Adrianople and pitched camp. As he waited impatiently for the arrival of Gratian, the western emperor, he took counsel with his officers.

Some, following the advice of Sebastian [Valens's nephew] recommended with urgency that he should at once go forth to battle; while Victor, master-general of the cavalry, a Sarmatian by birth, but a man of slow and cautious temper, recommended him to wait for his imperial colleague, and this advice was supported by several officers, who suggested that the reinforcement of [Gratian, the western emperor's] army would be likely to awe the fiery arrogance of the barbarians.

However, the fatal obstinacy of the emperor prevailed, fortified by the flattery of some of the princes, who advised him to hasten with all speed so that Gratian might have no share in a victory which, as they fancied, was already almost gained.

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The Roman army draws near the Goths, and the battle begins.

Then, having traversed the broken ground, which divided the two armies, as the burning day was progressing towards noon, at last, after marching eight miles, our men came in sight of the waggons of the enemy all arranged in a circle. According to their custom, the barbarian host raised a fierce and hideous yell, while the Roman generals marshalled their line of battle. The right wing of the cavalry was placed in front; the chief portion of the infantry was kept in reserve.

But the left wing of the cavalry, of which a considerable number were still straggling on the road, were advancing with speed, though with great difficulty.

In the meantime the cavalry of the Goths had returned . . .; these descending from the mountains like a thunderbolt, spread confusion and slaughter among all whom in their rapid charge they came across.

And while arms and missiles of all kinds were meeting in fierce conflict, and Bellona [the goddess of war], blowing her mournful trumpet, was raging more fiercely than usual to inflict disaster on the Romans, our men began to retreat; but roused by the reproaches of their officers, they made a fresh stand, and the battle increased like a conflagration, terrifying our soldiers, numbers of whom were pierced by strokes from the javelins hurled at them, and from arrows.

Then the two lines of battle dashed against each other, like the rams of warships, and thrusting with all their might, were tossed to and fro, like the waves of the sea. Our left wing had advanced actually up to the waggons, with the intent to push on still further if they were properly supported; but they were deserted by
the rest of the cavalry, and so pressed upon by
the superior numbers of the enemy, that they
were overwhelmed and beaten down, like the
ruin of a vast rampart. Presently our infantry
also was left unsupported, while the different
companies became so huddled together that a
soldier could hardly draw his sword, or with­
draw his hand after he had once stretched it out.
And by this time such clouds of dust arose that
it was scarcely possible to see the sky, which re­
sounded with horrible cries; and in conse­
quence, the darts, which were bearing death on
every side, reached their mark, and fell with
deadly effect because no one could see them be­
forehand so as to guard against them.

But when the barbarians, rushing on with
their enormous host, beat down our horses and
men, and left no spot to which our ranks could
fall back to deploy, they were so closely packed
that it was impossible to escape by forcing a way
through them. Our men at last began to despise
death, and again took to their swords, and slew
all they encountered, while with mutual blows
of battleaxes, helmets, and breastplates were
dashed in pieces.

Then you might see the barbarian towering
in his fierceness, hissing or shouting, fall with
his legs pierced through, or his right hand cut
off, sword and all, or his side transfixed, and
still, in the last gasp of life, casting round him
defiant glances. The plain was covered with car­
casses, strewing the mutual ruin of the combat­
ants, while the groans of the dying, or of men
fearfully wounded, were intense and caused
great dismay all around.

Amidst all this great tumult and confusion
our infantry were exhausted by toil and danger,
till at last they had neither strength left to
fight, nor spirits to plan anything; their spears
were broken by the frequent collisions, so that
they were forced to content themselves with
their drawn swords, which they thrust into the
dense battalions of the enemy, disregarding
their own safety, and seeing that every possibil­
ity of escape was cut off from them.

The ground, covered with streams of blood,
made their feet slip, so that all that they endeav­
oured to do was to sell their lives as dearly as
possible; and with such vehemence did they re­
sist their enemies who pressed on them, that
some were even killed by their own weapons. At
last one black pool of blood disfigured every­
ing, and wherever the eye turned, it could see
nothing but piled-up heaps of dead, and lifeless
corpses trampled on without mercy.

The sun being now high in the heavens, hav­
ing traversed the sign of Leo, and reached the
abode of the heavenly Virgo, scorched the Ro­
mans, who were emaciated by hunger, worn out
with toil, and scarcely able to support even the
weight of their armour. At last our columns
were entirely beaten back by the overpowering
weight of the barbarians, and so they took to
disorderly flight, which is the only resource in
extremity, each man trying to save himself as
well as he could.

While they were all flying and scattering
themselves over roads with which they were un­
acquainted, the emperor, bewildered with terri­
able fear, made his way over heap of dead, and
fled to the battalions of the Lancearii and the
Martiarii, who, till the superior numbers of the
enemy became wholly irresistible, stood firm
and immovable. As soon as he saw him, Trajan
[the Roman commander] exclaimed that all
hope was lost, unless the emperor, thus deserted
by his guards, could be protected by the aid of
his foreign allies.

When this exclamation was heard, a count
named Victor hastened to bring up with all
speed the Batavians, who were placed in the re­
serve and who ought to have been near at hand,
but as none of them could be found, he too
retreated, and in a similar manner Richomeres
and Saturninus [other Roman officers] saved
themselves from danger.

So now, with rage flashing in their eyes, the
barbarians pursued our men, who were in a state
of torpor, the warmth of their veins having de­
serted them. Many were slain without knowing
who smote them; some were overwhelmed by
the mere weight of the crowd which pressed
upon them; and some were slain by wounds—
inflicted by their own comrades. The barbarians
spared neither those who yielded nor those who resisted.

Besides these, many half-slain lay blocking up the roads, unable to endure the torture of their wounds; and heaps of dead horses were piled up and filled the plain with their carcasses. At last a dark moonless night put an end to the irremediable disaster which cost the Roman state so dear.

Just when it first became dark, the emperor being among a crowd of common soldiers, as it was believed—for no one said either that he had seen him, or been near him—was mortally wounded with an arrow, and, very shortly after, died, though his body was never found. For as some of the enemy loitered for a long time about the field in order to plunder the dead, none of the defeated army or of the inhabitants ventured to go to them. . . .

. . . Many illustrious men fell in this disastrous defeat. . . . Scarcely one-third of the whole army escaped. Nor, except the battle of Cannae, is so destructive a slaughter recorded in our annals.

After this disastrous battle, when night had veiled the earth in darkness, those who survived fled, some to the right, some to the left, or wherever fear guided them, each man seeking refuge among his relations, as no one could think of anything but himself, while all fancied the lances of the enemy sticking in their backs. And far off were heard the miserable wailings of those who were left behind—the sobbing of the dying, and the agonizing groans of the wounded.

But when daylight returned, the conquerors, like wild beasts rendered still more savage by the blood they had tasted and allured by the temptations of groundless hope, marched in a dense column upon Adrianople.

Salvian

POLITICAL AND SOCIAL INJUSTICE

The growing hatred of citizens for the Roman state is well delineated in a book called *The Governance of God*, by Salvian (Salvianus) of Marseilles (c. A.D. 400–470). A Christian priest, Salvian was an eyewitness to the end of Roman rule in Gaul. He describes the political and moral causes of the collapse of the Roman state in the west in the following reading.

What towns, as well as what municipalities and villages are there in which there are not as many tyrants as *curiales*.1 Perhaps they glory in this name of tyrant because it seems to be considered powerful and honored. For, almost all robbers rejoice and boast, if they are said to be more fierce than they really are. What place is there, as I have said, where the bowels of widows and orphans are not devoured by the leading men of the cities, and with them those of almost all holy men? . . . Not one of them [widows and orphans], therefore, is safe. In a manner, except for the very powerful, neither is anyone safe from the devastation of general brigandage, unless they are like the robbers themselves. To this state of affairs, indeed, to this crime has the world come that, unless one is bad, he cannot be safe. . . .

All the while, the poor are despoiled, the widows groan, the orphans are tread underfoot, so much so that many of them, and they are not of obscure birth and have received a liberal education, flee to the enemy lest they die from the

1The *curiales* were members of the municipal councils. In the late years of the Roman Empire, they were forced to act as tax collectors for the central government and to pay from their own pockets whatever sums they could not collect from the overtaxed inhabitants.
pain of public persecution. They seek among the barbarians the dignity of the Roman because they cannot bear barbarous indignity among the Romans. Although these Romans differ in religion and language from the barbarians to whom they flee, and differ from them in respect to filthiness of body and clothing, nevertheless, as I have said, they prefer to bear among the barbarians a worship unlike their own rather than rampant injustice among the Romans.

Salvian tells how Roman citizens are deserting Rome to live under the rule of the Goths and other barbarian invaders. Moreover, in many parts of Spain and Gaul (France), peasants called Bagaudae have rebelled and established zones free from Roman authority.

Thus, far and wide, they migrate either to the Goths or to the Bagaudae, or to other barbarians everywhere in power; yet they do not repent having migrated. They prefer to live as freemen under an outward form of captivity than as captives under an appearance of liberty. Therefore, the name of Roman citizens, at one time not only greatly valued but dearly bought, is now repudiated and fled from, and it is almost considered not only base but even deserving of abhorrence.

And what can be a greater testimony of Roman wickedness than that many men, upright and noble and to whom the position of being a Roman citizen should be considered as of the highest splendor and dignity, have been driven by the cruelty of Roman wickedness to such a state of mind that they do not wish to be Romans? ... I am now about to speak of the Bagaudae who were despoiled, oppressed and murdered by evil and cruel judges. After they had lost the right of Roman citizenship, they also lost the honor of bearing the Roman name. We blame their misfortunes on themselves. We ascribe to them a name which signifies their downfall. We give to them a name of which we ourselves are the cause. We call them rebels. We call those outlaws whom we compelled to be criminal.

For, by what other ways did they become Bagaudae, except by our wickedness, except by the wicked ways of judges, except by the proscription and pillage of those who have turned the assessments of public taxes into the benefit of their own gain and have made the tax levies their own booty? Like wild beasts, they did not rule but devoured their subjects, and feasted not only on the spoils of men, as most robbers are wont to do, but even on their torn flesh and, as I may say, on their blood.

Thus it happened that men, strangled and killed by the robberies of judges, began to live as barbarians because they were not permitted to be Romans. They became satisfied to be what they were not, because they were not permitted to be what they were. They were compelled to defend their lives at least, because they saw that they had already completely lost their liberty. ...

But what else can these wretched people wish for, they who suffer the incessant and even continuous destruction of public tax levies. To them there is always imminent a heavy and relentless proscription. They desert their homes, lest they be tortured in their very homes. They seek exile, lest they suffer torture. The enemy is more lenient to them than the tax collectors. This is proved by this very fact, that they flee to the enemy in order to avoid the full force of the heavy tax levy. This very tax levying, although hard and inhuman, would nevertheless be less heavy and harsh if all would bear it equally and in common. Taxation is made more shameful and burdensome because all do not bear the burden of all. They extort tribute from the poor man for the taxes of the rich, and the weaker carry the load for the stronger. There is no other reason that they cannot bear all the taxation except that the burden imposed on the wretched is greater than their resources. ...
Therefore, in the districts taken over by the barbarians, there is one desire among all the Romans, that they should never again find it necessary to pass under Roman jurisdiction. In those regions, it is the one and general prayer of the Roman people that they be allowed to carry on the life they lead with the barbarians.

And we wonder why the Goths are not conquered by our portion of the population, when the Romans prefer to live among them rather than with us. Our brothers, therefore, are not only altogether unwilling to flee to us from them, but they even cast us aside in order to flee to them.

**Saint Jerome**

**THE FATE OF ROME**

Saint Jerome (Hieronymus, c. A.D. 340–420) was one of the major theologians and scriptural scholars of the late Roman period. He left Rome itself to join a monastery in Bethlehem in Judea, where he studied Hebrew and began work on a monumental new translation of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures into Latin. This new edition, called the Vulgate (written in the Latin of the common people), became the standard text of the Bible in the Western church for more than a thousand years. In the following letter to Agenuchia, a highborn lady of Gaul, Saint Jerome bemoans the fate of Rome, once so proud and powerful. The letter, dated A.D. 409, was written at a critical moment: the Visigoths had accepted a huge ransom to end their siege of Rome.

Nations innumerable and most savage have invaded all Gaul. The whole region between the Alps and the Pyrenees, the ocean and the Rhine, has been devastated by the Quadi, the Vandals, the Sarmati, the Alani, the Gepidae, the hostile Heruli, the Saxons, the Burgundians, the Alemanni, and the Pannonians [barbarian tribes]. O wretched Empire! Mayence [Mainz], formerly so noble a city, has been taken and ruined, and in the church many thousands of men have been massacred. Worms has been destroyed after a long siege. Rheims, that powerful city, Amiens, Arras, Speyer, Strasbourg,—all have seen their citizens led away captive into Germany. Aquitaine and the provinces of Lyons and Narbonne, all save a few towns, have been depopulated; and these the sword threatens without, while hunger ravages within. I cannot speak without tears of Toulouse, which the merits of the holy Bishop Exuperius have prevailed so far to save from destruction. Spain, even, is in daily terror lest it perish, remembering the invasion of the Cimbri; and whatsoever the other provinces have suffered once, they continue to suffer in their fear.

I will keep silence concerning the rest, lest I seem to despair of the mercy of God. For a long time, from the Black Sea to the Julian Alps, those things which are ours have not been ours; and for thirty years, since the Danube boundary was broken, war has been waged in the very midst of the Roman Empire. Our tears are dried by old age. Except a few old men, all were born in captivity and siege, and do not desire the liberty they never knew.

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1The Cimbri, originally from what is now Denmark, spread southward to invade Spain, Gaul, and Italy in the late part of the second century B.C. They were defeated by the Roman general Marius (c. 157–86 B.C.).
2The mountains called the Julian Alps are in northwest Slovenia.

*The names of modern cities here used are not in all cases exact equivalents for the names of the regions mentioned by Jerome.*
When the Visigoths led by Alaric sacked Rome in 410, Jerome lamented in another passage.

Who could believe that Rome, built upon the conquest of the whole world, would fall to the ground? that the mother herself would become the tomb of her peoples?

Pope Gregory I
THE END OF ROMAN GLORY

In the late sixth century, the Lombards, the last Germanic tribe to invade those lands that had once been Roman, swept down the Tiber valley and in 593 were at the gates of Rome. At that time, Pope Gregory I, the Great (590–604), descendant of a prominent and wealthy Roman senatorial family, reflected on Rome, once the mistress of the world.

We see on all sides sorrows; we hear on all sides groans. Cities are destroyed, fortifications razed to the ground, fields devastated, the land reduced to solitude. No husbandman is left in the field, few inhabitants remain in the cities, and yet these scanty remnants of the human race are still each day smitten without ceasing. . . . Some men are led away captive, others are mutilated, others slain before our eyes. What is there, then, my brethren to please us in this world?

What Rome herself, once deemed the Mistress of the World, has now become, we see—wasted away with afflictions, grievous and many, with the loss of citizens, the assaults of enemies, the frequent fall of ruined buildings. . . . For where is the Senate? Where is the People [the State]? The bones are dissolved, the flesh is consumed, all the pomp of the dignities of this world is gone. . . . Yet even we who remain few as we are, still are daily smitten with the sword, still are daily crushed by innumerable afflictions. . . . For the Senate is no more, and the People has perished, yet sorrow and sighing are multiplied daily among the few that are left. Rome is, as it were, already empty and burning. . . . But where are they who once rejoiced in her glory? Where is their pomp? Where their pride? Where their constant and immediate joy? . . . . . . The Sons of men of the world, when they wished for worldly advancement came together from all parts of the earth to this city. But now behold! she is desolate. Behold! she is wasted away. No one hastens to her for worldly advancement.

REVIEW QUESTIONS
1. How does Ammianus account for Rome's defeat at Adrianople?
2. What conditions in late Roman society undermined the social and political bonds between the rulers and the ruled?
3. What were the consequences of the Germanic invasions as depicted by Saint Jerome and Pope Gregory I?