

## The Roman World

*tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento  
(hae erunt artes), pacique imponere morem,  
parcere subiectis et debellare superbos. . . .*

*You, Roman, remember to rule the peoples with power  
(these will be your arts), to graft custom onto peace, to spare the conquered,  
and to subdue the proud. . . .*

—Anchises to Aeneas, Virgil's *The Aeneid*, 6.851–3, Translated by Sue Gilmore

**A**lthough the quotation above appears in Latin and English, its source, *The Aeneid*, combines a Greek story from Homer with settings in Southwest Asia, North Africa, Sicily, and, finally, the Italian Peninsula. This epic by the Roman poet Virgil thus brings together in one work many of the cultural combinations presented in the previous chapter. Additionally, the epic accurately forecasts the cultural, political, and military legacies of the Roman Empire, continuities still apparent in much of the world. *The Aeneid* displays for the reader Virgil's ideal of leadership, an ideal he was anxious to pass on to his patron, Augustus Caesar. Virgil's lessons might have helped the Roman Empire survive had it been followed by *all* the Roman emperors.

### Rome as a Monarchy (c. 753–509 B.C.E.)

Like the earlier Greek civilization, Roman civilization developed on a giant peninsula. But while geography hindered Greek unity, it did not prevent Italian unity. For example, the *Apennine Mountains*, which run the length of that peninsula, are less rugged than the mountains of Greece. The Apennines did not prevent trade or travel in ancient times.

**Etruscans and Latins** The city of Rome owes much of its early history to the combining of three groups, often warring but sometimes collaborating: *Etruscans*, *Latins*, and Greeks. The Etruscans were settled in the northern Italian Peninsula when Rome was yet a village on seven hills. They later mingled with the less advanced Latins of central Italy. They gained an alphabet from the Greek colonists of southern Italy, with whom they traded.

As shown by the remarkable tombs still existing in Italy, Etruscan skills included building with stone. The Etruscans mined iron, copper, and tin and made metal weapons and tools. Similarly, Etruscans were probably responsible for the roads and temples of this early Roman period, as well as for military tactics displayed in battles.

**Political Traditions** According to tradition or myth, the village on seven hills that would become *Rome* was always welcoming to outcasts and outsiders, and it grew accordingly. Tradition also suggests that local tribes agreed to have a rotating kingship, which began with Romulus (the supposed son of the war god Mars). According to legend, Romulus killed his twin brother Remus after an argument about where to locate the new city, and gave his name to the city in 753 B.C.E.

More certain than these stories are the accomplishments of the early Romans. They drained swamps, which gave them a large amount of fertile land, significantly more than the Greek city-states had. They found nearby sources of drinking water and metal ores. The site that became Rome, 15 miles up the *Tiber River* from the *Tyrrhenian Sea*, was good for trade and yet far enough from the ocean to be easily defended against sea-borne attackers. It would soon become the central point for interaction with other settlements in Italy.

Comparing Early Forms of Government				
Civilization	Form of Government	Leading Individual or Body	Characteristics	Relationship Between Government and Religion
Egypt: Middle Kingdom	Dynasty, highly centralized	Pharaoh	Hierarchy of appointed officials under the pharaoh	Pharaoh was seen as both a ruler and a god
Greece: Athens City-State	Direct democracy, highly decentralized	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Assembly (all citizens)</li> <li>• Council of 500 (chosen by lottery)</li> <li>• Courts (magistrates chosen by lottery)</li> </ul>	Males over 18 were considered citizens, and they could participate in government	Religion was separate from government but influential
China: Han Dynasty	Dynasty, centralized	Emperor with advice from officials	Officials chosen by Emperor based on skill and knowledge following Confucian ideas	Religion was mostly separate from functions of government
Rome: Republic	Republic, centralized	Emperor and Senate	Citizens elect senators	Religion was separate from government but influential

## From Monarchy to Republic

Government in Rome evolved as a practical response to both improvements and domestic pressure for protection. By the early 500s, when Tarquinius Superbus (Tarquin the Proud), ruled the city, he was a tyrant. He was also the final monarch of early Rome. Opposition to his rule arose among the *patricians*, or wealthy landowners. In 509 B.C.E., they overthrew him. But instead of creating another monarchy, they established a government of elected officials—a *republic*. It was a representative government, not a direct democracy like Athens had for a while. At first, only the wealthiest and the most prestigious Roman citizens were represented in the *Senate*. Holding tenure for life, senators increased in number to about 300 during the fourth century B.C.E.

**Plebeians and Magistrates** Most Romans were *plebeians*—small farmers, tradespeople, craftsmen, and common soldiers. Gradually, they began to call for political reforms so they could have a say in government. In 287 B.C.E., they won the right to be full citizens. They got their own assemblies—the Assembly of Tribes and the Assembly of Centuries—where plebeians could pass laws and select *magistrates*, officials who carried out the day-to-day operations of government. The Senate and the assemblies also acted as courts, deciding disputes between people and trying individuals accused of breaking the law.

**Tribunes** Additionally, new officials called *tribunes* were elected to represent the plebeians. They could exercise veto power in the Senate, although the ever-practical senatorial politicians often included these representatives of the “plebs” in their leadership circles in order to keep favor. These patron-client relationships became an important part of political as well as social life. A senator used his lower-class clients to bolster his prestige, to serve as “extras” who would cheer him through the streets or mourn at family funerals and greet arriving banquet guests. In return for these duties, the clients were granted a measure of protection and, sometimes, rations of bread and wine.

**Consuls** The most important magistrates were two *consuls*. They were elected by Roman citizens to preside over the government and to serve as commanders of armies in military campaigns. One consul could block the acts of the other by saying “*veto*,” which is Latin for “I forbid it.” This is one of the earliest examples of *checks and balances*—a way of dividing power to keep any part of government from becoming excessively powerful. (To read about how checks and balances are used in the government of the United States, see a government textbook.)

**Rule of Law** Inequities in the unwritten system of laws brought about unrest and strikes from the plebeians and their leadership. One government response was to display the *Laws of the Twelve Tables* publicly (c. 450 B.C.E.). Putting written laws in the full view of the public provided a check on the injustices of the judiciary system, an important concept built into numerous later constitutions. The Laws of the Twelve Tables dealt with almost every aspect of life—including business transactions, property boundaries and

penalties for crimes. More laws and political institutions evolved as the need for them arose. (Test Prep: Create a table comparing the Laws of the Twelve Tables with the Code of Hammurabi. See page 21.)

Rule of law created a career path for lawyers. Rich and powerful senators and merchants brought legal cases, often against corrupt officials. One of the greatest members of the legal profession was *Cicero*, trained in writing and oratory by Greek teachers as well as Roman ones. His elegant writing is still studied today for its clarity, preciseness, and persuasiveness. The existence of courts, references to legal terms, and entire orations given in the course of lawsuits testify to the significance of the rule of law in the Republic.

## Roman Expansion

After overthrowing its own king, Rome encouraged central Italy's other city-states to revolt against the Etruscans. After the city-states were free of Etruscan rule, the Romans conquered them. By 275 B.C.E., Rome controlled the entire Italian Peninsula.

Adept leaders and smoothly organized armies became the Roman trademark. Equally helpful in running the large area they had conquered was the extension of privileges to the conquered peoples. Citizenship was often the reward for supplying troops and tribute to Rome. Later, small Italian cities demanded the privilege of providing soldiers and money so their residents could become Roman citizens.

**Greece and Gaul** As Rome extended its power into southern Italy, it developed conflicts with Greeks over control of Greek colonies. In 275 B.C.E., the Romans defeated a Greek army that had invaded Italy to protect the Greek colonies there. Then, in a series of four wars between 215 and 148 B.C.E., Rome defeated Macedonia, in northern Greece. The Romans went on to take control of what remained of the empire created by Alexander the Great. In addition, the Romans moved north and west to conquer parts of Gaul, a territory that is part of what is now France.

**Carthage and Beyond** One of Rome's largest conflicts was with *Carthage*, a city-state across the Mediterranean on the north coast of Africa. Carthage had once belonged to the Phoenician Empire but had since created its own empire by conquering parts of Spain. Rome and Carthage both wanted to control the Mediterranean trade. They fought a series of three wars between 264 and 146 B.C.E., the *Punic Wars*. When the Romans finally captured Carthage in 146 B.C.E., they destroyed the city, enslaved its population, and, according to legend, salted the land to make it infertile, thereby condemning Carthage to poverty for years to come. Today, ending a war with the complete destruction of an enemy is known as a *Carthaginian peace*.

The victory over Carthage gave Rome control of a large empire, including North Africa, Spain, and Sicily. The Romans later rebuilt Carthage and maintained a colony there. It became the empire's fourth-largest city. Roman armies also conquered swaths of modern Syria, Egypt, Britain, and Germany by the middle of the first century C.E.

However, conquest was not permanent. For example, centuries later, in 439 C.E., the nomadic *Vandals*—who had invaded North Africa from Spain—took Carthage, and in 455 they conquered Rome itself.

**Soldiers** All male citizens between ages 17 and 46 who owned land were required to serve in the Roman *legions*. These large armies were needed to fight wars and to guard the expanding empire. Most soldiers were poor farmers. When they entered the army, many sold their small farms to wealthy patricians. The patricians combined their purchases to create huge estates, known as *latifundia*. While some soldiers settled elsewhere in the empire once their services were complete, many others came to Rome. Around the time of Julius Caesar, Rome's population was probably more than one million people and growing.

## Roman Society

Patricians and plebeians were influential in Roman society. Less powerful were two other groups: slaves and women.

**Slaves** Most slaves were foreigners captured during Rome's wars. They were brought to Italy to work in homes and on the large farms of wealthy Romans. The *latifundia* of the patricians required an ever-increasing number of slaves. Except in poor families, raising and educating Roman children was carried out by slaves, often Greek ones. Among wealthy Romans, some slaves even ran the households.

With conquests increasing, the number of captives available for slavery grew. Conditions of slavery became harsher, especially after the *Spartacus Rebellion* in 73 B.C.E. when a slave named Spartacus led one of the largest slave revolts in history. Roman soldiers killed thousands of rebels before the revolt was crushed, and another 6,000 slaves were captured and executed by crucifixion.

The existence of so many slaves slowed down growth and innovation in the Roman economy. Slave labor was so cheap that landowners had little incentive to develop new technology.

**Decline of Small Landholders** The low cost of slave labor was one of two factors that caused a decline in the number of small landowners. Independent farmers and tenants could not compete successfully against production by slaves. In addition, the years many small farmers spent in the military cost many of them their land. As time passed, large estates absorbed more and more of the holdings that had previously been farmed by the small landowners.

**Women** In early Roman society, women faced many forms of discrimination. Only men could be citizens. Women could not vote. In married couples, men owned all the family property and headed the households. However, young women of high social position usually received some level of education. Further, women could inherit property and other forms of wealth

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from their fathers, which gave them influence with their husbands. (Test Prep: Write a paragraph comparing the role of women in Roman society with the role of women in classical India. See page 95.)

## Civil Wars

Strong Roman military leaders completed numerous conquests in the last two centuries B.C.E. Each leader raised armies through promises of land; these promises lead to the existence of personal armies more loyal to individual leaders than to Rome. For example, *Gaius Marius*, *Lucius Pompey Magnus*, and *Julius Caesar* were all popular and successful generals whose troops were devoted to them. In the following generation, the same would be true for *Marc Antony* and *Octavian* (later known as *Augustus*). Clashes between vying groups of Romans thus became civil wars in which generals opposed one another for leadership of the state.

The conflict between generals for power in Rome reached a decisive point in the first century B.C.E. One general, Marius, was a "new man" not born to the senatorial class. He was elected six times to the consulship. The other consul, Sulla, came from a more patrician family. Sulla was successful over Marius during their lifetime. However, Marius' nephew Julius Caesar would prevail and drive Sulla from the city. Caesar was a *popularis*, an aristocrat whose strength was based on his support from the common people of Rome, such as the plebeians, rather than just other elites. His armies had finally become too powerful for the representative government of the Republic to prevail.

**End of the Republic** Julius Caesar, after vanquishing his major foe, Pompey, and becoming sole consul, became dictator for life in 46 B.C.E. He accomplished major reforms such as revising the calendar, increasing the size of the Senate, extending citizenship, and granting land to some poor veterans. Caesar also added conquests for Rome as far away as the German forests and Egypt. However, frightened by his power and influence, a group of conspirators attacked and killed him on the famous "Ides of March" (March 15, 44 B.C.E.). Competition between the two remaining generals—Octavian and Marc Antony—led to the downfall of the Republic and the establishment of the Roman Empire.

Having defeated conspirators at Philippi (in Macedonia), Antony and Octavian turned on each other, first temporarily dividing the Roman lands between them, east and west. However, at the *Battle of Actium* on the Ionian Sea in 31 B.C.E., Octavian defeated Antony and proclaimed himself sole ruler of Rome.

## The Roman Empire (27 B.C.E.–476 C.E.)

With the help of a Senate grateful for an end to the civil war, Octavian began to mold Rome into the image he wanted. His goals were to strengthen family values, keep the peace, and promote prosperity. The result was a hugely

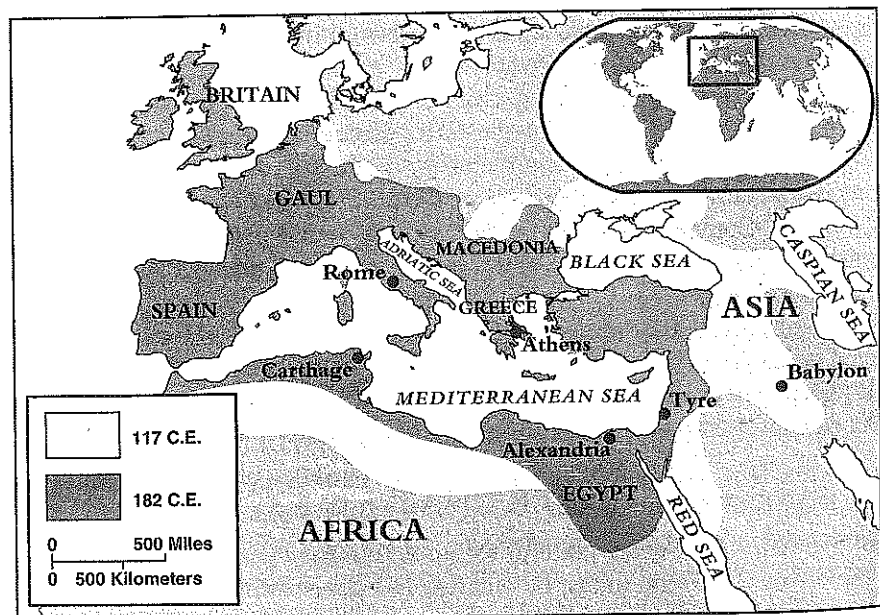
successful, well-governed empire that extended throughout the Mediterranean. One Roman historian quoted Octavian as saying, "I found Rome a city of bricks and left it a city of marble." Octavian was proclaimed "Augustus Caesar," and the next 200 years became known as *Pax Romana*, or Roman peacetime. (Test Prep: List the similarities and differences between the Pax Romana with the Pax Mongolica (Mongolian peace). See page 243.)

**Roads and Defenses** Rome built a network of roads that made movement of trade goods, written orders, and soldiers and their provisions easier. In addition, Rome built fortresses and walls to protect strategic cities and transportation points.

**Social Classes** The social and political hierarchy established in the days of the Republic continued into the Empire Period. Some upward mobility was possible: a new *equestrian class* was available to male Roman citizens whose property was valued at 400,000 sesterces (at a time when Roman legionaries were making about 900 sesterces per year). Equestrians could hold positions of authority in government but not ones as influential as those occupied by senators and their families.

The senatorial class became the instrument of Augustus and later rulers by which they directed the affairs of the empire. However, Augustus and his successors made clear that their will was absolute. Augustus offered a tax bonus to members of this class who had more than two children because he wished to see the numbers of the aristocracy increase.

THE ROMAN EMPIRE



Lower classes, no longer as ably represented in their popular assemblies, were nevertheless pacified by free games and grain and the possibility, however unlikely, of advancing in the social order. Slavery continued to increase as both businesses and large estates increased. Greek slaves were in high demand as physicians and teachers, maintaining the continuity of Greek culture. Slaves could sometimes buy their freedom, becoming newly rich "freedmen," but slaves who ran away and were caught received the brand "F" for *fugitivus* on their foreheads.

**Women** During the Empire Period, the rights of women expanded over what existed in early centuries. For example, women could divorce—many upper class women did so in the tumultuous times preceding the takeover by Augustus. They also began to exercise more property rights as new inheritance laws allowed them to gain and keep control of property. Typical of their increasing influence was their presence as near-equals in social events, something made clear by the art and literature of the period. Even without political rights, the economic worth of women who ran businesses gave them some political influence.

Roman histories and literature abound with frequent references to strong, educated women. This shows that Roman women had more influence than their counterparts to the east in the Hellenistic world, in India, or in China. One avenue to independence opened for widows whose husbands and fathers had both died, leaving the women to start handling their own affairs.

**Law** Not least of the accomplishments of the Augustan era were those in law. Although Cicero had been killed in the purges undertaken by Antony, Roman law continued to spread to all parts of the empire. For example, it was Roman law that allowed the Christian apostle Paul to insist on being taken to Rome for trial as a citizen—a journey that would aid in the establishment of the early Christian Church in Rome.

**Literature and Philosophy** As well as operating under the rule of law, Augustus saw himself also as a patron of literature. Famous writers such as *Virgil* and *Horace* were recipients of his generosity, as was *Ovid* until Augustus banished him to the far edge of the Black Sea (perhaps because *Ovid* wrote love poetry). Historians such as *Livy* and *Tacitus* carried on the tradition of Roman literature in the first century C.E. Philosophers such as *Seneca* did as well. *Seneca* would become the tutor of the infamous *Nero*, an emperor symbolic of decadent rulers during the long, gradual decline of the Roman Empire.

Roman writers were heavily influenced by Greek traditions. For example, writers of the early Empire continued to use Greek forms for poetry. Further, Greek ideas lay behind such Roman philosophies as *Epicureanism*, which promoted living simply, enjoying the pleasures of life, and not focusing on appealing to the gods. Another Roman philosophy based on Greek ideas was *Stoicism*, which emphasized that people should learn to accept the will of the gods and remained detached from pleasure and pain. Romans attempted to find the answers to questions about all aspects of life—from the existence of gods to the meaning of life to how to live ethically.



## Roman Religion

*Syncretism* played a key part in many aspects of Roman culture, including religion. For example, they frequently fused local Latin deities with the Greek pantheon of gods. Roman homes had an altar for the local divinities, but the family also went to temples and state celebrations carried out under the auspices of the chief priest, or *pontifex maximus*. Romans required everyone to practice the state religion. However, like the Persians, they tolerated the practice of additional religions as well. Unlike the Persians, many of whom were monotheistic Zoroastrians, the Romans were polytheistic.

**State Religion** Polytheistic and tolerant, Roman leaders praised their state gods such as Jupiter and Minerva for showing favor as they built their empire. The temple to Vesta, for example, had a group of priestesses who guarded the sacred flame of Rome. Such priestesses grew wealthy and influential in the city. An additional aspect of state religion that would grow more apparent after the death of Augustus was worship of the emperor.

**Personal Religion** Lares and Penates, old gods believed to protect the household, were still worshipped in the years of the Roman Empire. These gods were the objects of various household rituals. But Romans who yearned for more spiritual beliefs also joined *mystery cults*, religious groups whose followers were promised an afterlife if they underwent secret rituals and purification rites. Some Romans joined in the rites called Eleusinian mysteries (originating in Greece) and the cult of Isis (from Egypt).

**Jews Under Roman Rule** The Jewish religion consolidated in Jerusalem in what is known as the Second Temple period (530 B.C.E. to 79 C.E.). Jewish scholars codified the Hebrew scriptures, which included Mesopotamian cultural and legal influences brought back to Jerusalem from the Babylonian exile.

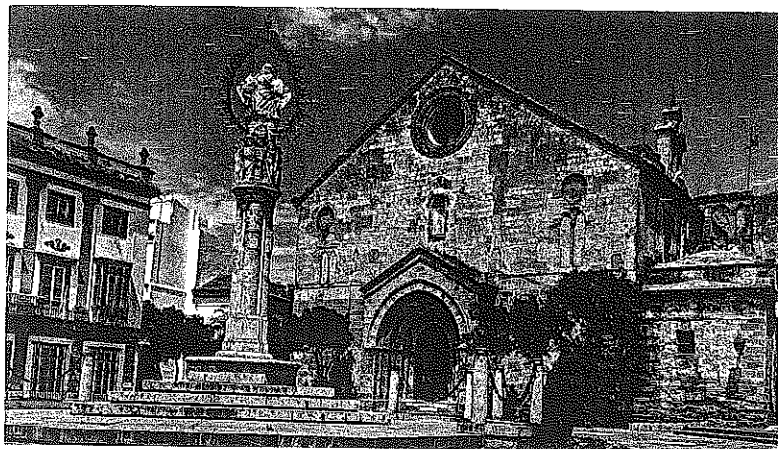
The Romans captured Jerusalem in 70 B.C.E. Cicero and other Roman writers of the late Republic and early empire were interested in the religion of the Jews. While Romans might have added the Jewish deity to their pantheon, they were not willing to give any deity exclusive worship. Conflicts between Jews and Romans resulted in three Jewish rebellions in the first two centuries C.E. Roman victories, and resulting persecution of the Jews, caused many Jews to flee their homes in the region around Jerusalem, continuing the diaspora begun in earlier centuries.

The situation of Jewish citizens was complicated by the Roman tendency to treat educated Jews with more deference than other “barbarian” groups in the empire. These circumstances positioned Jews to become scapegoats and objects of prejudice, a situation that would be repeated centuries later in history.

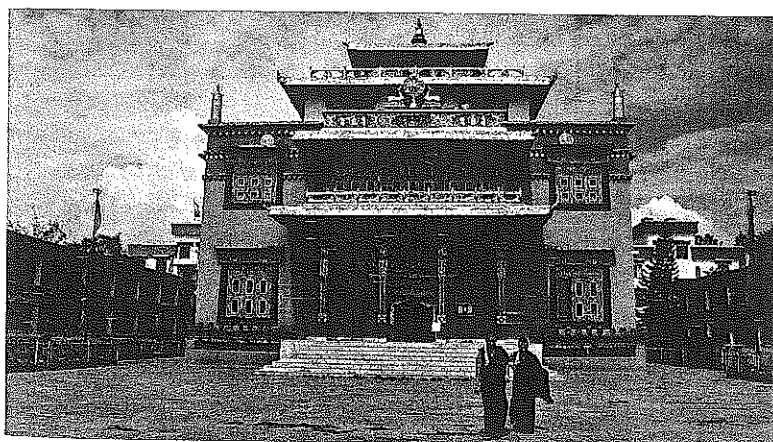
## Christianity

Into this Jewish community emerged the figure of *Jesus*, who challenged traditional religious leaders and was regarded as a troublemaker by Roman officials. Followers of Jesus spread his teachings throughout the Roman world. By the end of the first century C.E., *Christianity* was emerging as a

distinct form of Judaism and was on its way to becoming a separate religion altogether. Christianity was most popular among the urban poor, slaves, and women throughout the empire. Like the mystery cults and the philosophies of Epicureanism and Stoicism, Christianity appealed to people hungry for answers about the harshness of life and hopeful of an afterlife. The intellectual, political, and religious ferment of the first century C.E. was fertile ground for Christian teachings.



Source: Thinkstock



Source: Thinkstock

Christianity emphasized worship of God while Buddhism focused more inwardly. However, people in both traditions constructed solid, well-grounded buildings that represented their systems of belief as firm and dependable.

**Peter and Paul** One of the people particularly important in spreading the ideas of Jesus and shaping Christianity was *Peter* (died in 64 C.E.) He knew Jesus and was one of his first followers. Peter eventually came to Rome and is today regarded by the Roman Catholic Church as the first pope.

According to the Bible, *Paul* was a Jew who had a sudden, dramatic conversion to Christianity while traveling on a road leading into Damascus.

Though born during the lifetime of Jesus, Paul probably never met him. Paul spread the gospel according to Jesus around the Mediterranean by preaching at many of the great Hellenistic cities such as Ephesus and Corinth. Educated in the Hellenistic tradition of argument and teaching, Paul inspired other preachers as well before he died around 65 C.E.

**Features of Emergent Christianity** One trait of early Christianity was a focus on living simple lives isolated from society. This allowed members to concentrate on worship and reflection. Over time, some of these people joined together to form *monasteries*, buildings or collections of buildings where people devote their lives to the practice of a religion.

A second trait was *martyrdom*, a willingness to die rather than give up one's beliefs. Romans allowed people to worship their own gods, but they required people to respect the deities of the official state religion. Christians refused to do this, and thousands were imprisoned, tortured, and killed. Despite persecution, Christianity grew stronger. In 313 C.E., the Roman Emperor *Constantine* declared the religion to be legal in the *Edict of Milan*. Constantine became the first Christian emperor. In 330 C.E., he moved the seat of government to Constantinople. Under subsequent Roman emperors, the Christian religion became the official religion of the empire. (Test Prep: Outline the developments of Christianity up to the Byzantine Empire. See pages 131–134.)

A third trait of early Christianity was the appearance of written accounts about the development of the religion. These included four documents describing the life of Jesus, now known as the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They also included several letters written mostly by Paul to early fellowships, advising the members and commenting on the teachings of Jesus. Together, the Gospels and the letters form the core of what is now called the New Testament, a significant part of the Christian Bible.

**St. Augustine** As Rome entered its darker days, corruption, poor leadership, and encroaching barbarian hordes were common themes. In the fifth century C.E., a monk in Roman North Africa who would come to be known as *St. Augustine of Hippo* (354–430 C.E.) began to write the book *City of God*. Although many written works of St. Augustine survive, this one is particularly important because it points out the existence of a duality: even though the city of God on earth (Rome) might fall to “the barbarians,” the city of God in heaven would remain. Tensions that would later culminate in the *separation of church and state* are also present in this work.

## Interregional Trade Networks

St. Augustine's work in Roman North Africa illustrates the spread of Christianity to all parts of the Roman Empire and beyond. Christians also brought their religion to Mesopotamia, Persia, and India and even into Central Asia by way of the trade route connecting communities in Europe and Asia called the *Silk Roads*. The overland roads were *interregional* in that they connected regions

of various civilizations over long distances. They took several different routes, depending upon the climate, the friendliness of the territories being crossed, and the number of bandit attacks in a given period. Most of the traders took routes through Central Asian cities such as Samarkand and Tashkent. Some went through Indian cities such as Pataliputra and into the city of Kathmandu in Nepal. Traders often paid a portion of the goods as tribute to local lords to allow safe passage through their territories. Overland routes from China separated at the desert town of Dunhuang, one going north, one straight west, and one to the south. The routes overland generally converged at Constantinople, and from there goods went to Rome either overland or by sea. (Test Prep: Create a chart comparing the spread of Christianity with the spread of Zoroastrianism and the spread of Buddhism. See pages 60 and 99.)

**Sea Routes** Rome also conducted extensive trade to the east across water. Maritime commerce continued across the Indian Ocean as monsoons permitted. Up the Red Sea, after touching at Africa, goods at last reached the port of Rome at Ostia.

Although pirates were a constant problem, the waters of the Mediterranean were more easily navigated than those of an ocean because of smaller distances and numerous island stopping places. The Romans lacked sophisticated navigational equipment, but they still made truly amazing trips as far north as the Scilly Islands (the British islands most southerly from the coast of Wales), from which Roman ships brought back tin.

**New Technology and New Goods** A major advancement that made its way westward from Central Asia was the *stirrup* for mounted warriors. Stirrups provided greater stability for riders, which made horses easier to ride and control and, hence, more useful. Other goods—silks and spices and especially gold—were much prized by the upper classes of the Roman Empire. Not only did China grow wealthy from trade with Rome, but other cities along the Silk Roads (and increasingly on the trans-Saharan routes across northern Africa) also benefited from that trade. The markets of Samarkand, for example, introduced new fruits and vegetables, as well as rice and citrus products from Southwest Asia, to Europe. In East Africa, a large variety of imports and exports overlapped, suggesting a healthy trading economy. (Test Prep: Write a paragraph comparing the effects on trade of the stirrup and the camel saddle. See pages 165–166.)

## Decline of the Empire

From its peak in size and strength, Rome began a slow, uneven decline that began after the third century C.E. For example, the population of Rome declined from over one million to under 100,000.

**Population Decline** One cause of the waning population was directly related to the empire's expansion. The Silk Road brought trade and wealth, but it also introduced devastating epidemics. In the second century C.E., Rome experienced a marked decline in population caused by plagues of smallpox,

and measles. Epidemics killed as many as one-quarter of the population in some cities. Diseases spread again in the third and fourth centuries, and yet again in the sixth century. With the decline in population came a decline in trade, which led to slower economic activity and fewer taxes for the Roman state. As tax revenues dipped, Roman roads and aqueducts were not repaired as often and armies were not paid as regularly. Armies mutinied and trading became less safe, which continued the downward spiral of the empire's wealth and power.

**Environmental Problems** The success of Roman culture led to population growth around the Mediterranean region. Increasing demand for lumber, for buildings, and for fuel led to deforestation. Increasing demand for food led to overgrazing and farming marginal lands, resulting in soil erosion.

**Challenges from Non-Romans** The growth of the empire resulted in a larger area to defend. The empire had traditionally been able to absorb non-Romans, such as the Germanic Visigoths who settled in the empire and adopted an agricultural lifestyle in the second century. However, in the fifth century, the Huns led by Attila moved into Gaul from farther east. Their westward progression forced other peoples—the Visigoths, Ostrogoths, Vandals, and Franks—ahead of them into the empire. These additional groups settled around Western Europe and North Africa.

The turmoil from so much movement proved too widespread for Roman soldiers to handle. The Visigoths even sacked Rome in 410 C.E. The last Roman emperor was replaced by a Germanic ruler—Odovacer—in 476. From that period on, the remains of the empire were governed from Constantinople. (Test Prep: Write a paragraph comparing the breakup of the Roman Empire with the breakup of the Han Empire. See page 105.)

## Legacies of the Romans

The decline of the Roman Empire did not mean the end of their influence. The empire divided into two parts under *Diocletian* (ruled 284–305), with Rome remaining the capital of the western portion and Byzantium remaining the capital of the east. The eastern portion flourished for many more centuries. Only the western portion continued to decline. However, Roman influence can be seen throughout the world today but most strongly in Europe, Southwest Asia, and the United States.

**Law and Government** One clear inheritance from the Romans in the United States is the system of representative government with a Senate and House of Representatives as provided for by the U.S. Constitution. The writers of that document, such as James Madison, were students of Roman history, and they consciously adopted Rome as a model. Other institutions, such as checks on the legislators provided by the judiciary and independent courts abiding by the rule of law, can also be traced to the Romans.

**Architecture** The architectural feature known as the dome and paved roads are contributions of the Romans. Roman columns, temples, and amphitheaters can still be seen today throughout the world. Magnificent examples of aqueducts are scattered throughout Southern Europe and the Mediterranean area. Other practical innovations include large urban sewers as well as under-floor heating in urban homes. Excavations at two Roman cities, Pompeii and Herculaneum, attest to Roman building skills. The Romans put their considerable expertise in engineering to work in both public and private buildings. What remains of Roman structures reflects a solid style obviously built for permanence.

**Military** When Caesar declared to the Roman Senate in his report on the success of war in Asia Minor, "*Veni, vidi, vici*" ("I came, I saw, I conquered"), it was both a statement of fact and an apt description of his military tactics. Roman armies were efficient and organized, and they have served as models for militaries all the way to modern times. Legionnaires were disciplined to fight in small, flexible units as well as large troops of armored infantry. Army engineers developed extensive *catapults*, devices used to hurl stones a great distance, and *siege devices* such as battering rams, along with bridges and military camps that were laid out efficiently and established with great speed.

**Literature** Poets, playwrights, historians, and philosophers from classical Rome are still read today. The epic of Virgil, the comedies of Plautus (such as *Miles Gloriosus*, on which the modern comedy *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* is based), and the historical works of Seneca are but a few examples. Roman mythology can be seen in literature, movies, and advertising.

**Language** Last, and maybe most importantly, the Latin language provided the basis for the family of the European languages called the Romance languages, which include Italian, Romanian, Spanish, Portuguese, and French. English, though not a Romance language, traces over half of its words to Latin or one of the Romance languages.

Rome's influence remains strongly evident today. Similarly, the legacies of two other classical empires in Asia have left powerful legacies: Han China and the Gupta Empire.

### HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES: WHY DID ROME COLLAPSE?

Historians have come up with many explanations for Rome's decline. Why did a region of prosperity and innovation become one in which people had less wealth and less ability to overcome new problems? One Internet site listed 210 reasons. Some historians argue that the empire grew too large to be governed with the technology of the time. Others argue that the empire's wealth was wasted by too many wars of conquest. Or that too many leaders became too corrupt. Or that too many common citizens became too lazy.

**Impact of Christianity** One of the most provocative theories comes from the eighteenth-century English historian Edward Gibbon. He partially blames Christianity, with its emphasis on peace, forgiveness, and devotion to God, for undermining the Roman values that built the empire: military conquest, ruthless destruction of opponents, and intense loyalty to the Roman leaders.

**Desire for Status** Canadian historian Arthur Boak, in his 1921 book *A History of Rome to 565 A.D.*, saw a wide-ranging “transformation in society.” “Private industry languished, commerce declined, the fields lay unfilled; a general feeling of hopelessness paralyzed all initiative.” To Boak, the main culprit in the decline of Rome was the “change from a regime which encouraged individual initiative to a regime of status.” In other words, people became less honored for what they actually did, such as running a farm or a business successfully, and more impressed by the wealth or titles their ancestors had accumulated.

**The Environment** One of the more innovative theories in recent years is that Rome collapsed because of health problems caused by the heavy use of lead in aqueducts and dishes. This is an example of historical interpretation that has been made possible by new techniques for gathering information from artifacts.

**KEY TERMS BY THEME**

<b>STATE-BUILDING</b> republic Senate magistrates tribunes consuls checks and balances Laws of the Twelve Tables Cicero Carthage Punic Wars Vandals legions latifundia Spartacus Rebellion Marius Sulla Pompey Magnus Julius Caesar Marc Antony	Octavian Battle of Actium <i>Pax Romana</i> Constantine <i>Edict of Milan</i> St. Augustine separation of church and state <b>ENVIRONMENT</b> Apennine Mountains Etruscans Latins Rome Tiber River Tyrrhenian Sea catapults siege devices stirrup	<b>SOCIAL STRUCTURE</b> patricians plebeians equestrian class <b>CULTURE</b> Virgil <i>The Aeneid</i> Ovid Epicureanism Stoicism Syncretism <i>pontifex maximus</i> mystery cults Jesus Peter Paul Christianity martyrdom
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