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Mediterranean Society: The Roman Phase



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About 55 c.e. Roman guards transported a prisoner named Paul of Tarsus from the port of Caesarea in Palestine to the city of Rome. The journey turned out to be more eventful than the travelers had planned. The party boarded a sailing ship loaded with grain and carrying 276 passengers as well. The ship departed in the fall—after the main sailing season, which ran from May through September—and soon encountered a violent storm. For two frightening weeks crew and passengers alike worked furiously to keep the ship afloat, jettisoning baggage, tackle, and cargo to lighten the load as wind and rain battered the vessel. Eventually, the ship ran aground on the island of Malta, where storm-driven waves destroyed the craft. Yet most of the passengers and crew survived, including Paul and his guards, who spent three months on Malta before catching another ship to Rome.

Paul had become embroiled in a dispute between Jews and early proponents of the fledgling Christian religion. Christianity first emerged as a sect of Judaism accepted by only a small number of individuals who regarded Jesus of Nazareth as a savior for the Jewish community. By the mid-first century c.e., Christianity was attracting numerous converts throughout the Mediterranean basin. Paul himself was a devout Jew from Anatolia who accepted Christian teachings and became a zealous missionary seeking converts from outside as well as within the Jewish community. Indeed, he was the principal figure in the development of Christianity from a Jewish sect to an independent religious faith. When a crowd of Paul's enemies attacked him in Jerusalem, where he was promoting his recently adopted faith, the resulting disturbance became so severe that authorities of the Roman imperial government intervened to restore order. Under normal circumstances Roman authorities would deliver an individual like Paul to the leaders of his ethnic community, and the laws and customs of that community would determine the person's fate.

Paul's case, however, was different. Knowing that Jewish leaders would condemn him and probably execute him, Paul asserted his rights as a Roman citizen. Although he had never traveled west of Greece, Paul had inherited Roman citizenship from his father. As a result, he had the right to appeal his case to Rome, and he did so. His appeal did not succeed. No record of his case survives, but tradition holds that imperial authorities executed him out of concern that Christianity threatened the peace and stability of the Roman state.

Paul's experience reflects the cosmopolitan character of the early Roman empire, which by the first century c.e. dominated the entire Mediterranean basin. Roman administrators oversaw affairs from Anatolia and Palestine in the east to Spain and Morocco in the west. Roman military forces maintained order in an empire with scores of different and sometimes conflicting

OPPOSITE: A marble relief sculpture of about 100 c.e. depicts a crew of men working in a treadmill that powers a crane used in construction of a Roman temple.

ethnic and religious groups. Like many others, Paul of Tarsus traveled freely through much of the Roman empire in an effort to attract converts to Christianity. Indeed, except for the integration of the Mediterranean basin by the Roman empire, Paul's message and his faith might never have expanded beyond the small community of early Christians in Jerusalem.

Like the Phoenicians and Greeks before them, the Romans established close links between the various Mediterranean regions. As they conquered new lands, pacified them, and brought them into their empire, the Romans enabled merchants, missionaries, and others to travel readily throughout the Mediterranean basin. The Romans differed from their Phoenician and Greek predecessors, however, by building an extensive land empire and centralizing the administration of their realm. At its high point the Roman empire dominated the entire Mediterranean basin and parts of southwest Asia, including Anatolia, Mesopotamia, Syria, Egypt, and north Africa, besides much of continental Europe, and even parts of Britain.

The Roman empire also served as a forum for the communication of philosophical ideas and religious beliefs. Educated elites often embraced sophisticated Hellenistic philosophies, particularly Stoicism, which found adherents throughout the Roman empire. The larger population took comfort in popular religious beliefs, many of which promised personal salvation to devout followers. Over the long term, Christianity was the most successful of the popular religions of salvation. The early Christians encountered harsh opposition and persecution from Roman officials. Yet the new faith took advantage of the Romans' well-organized imperial holdings and spread rapidly throughout the Mediterranean basin and beyond. Eventually, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman empire, and imperial sponsorship enabled Christianity to spread more effectively than before.

From Kingdom To Republic

Founded in the eighth century B.C.E., the city of Rome was originally a small city-state ruled by a single king. Late in the sixth century B.C.E., the city's aristocrats deposed the king, ended the monarchy, and instituted a republic—a form of government in which delegates represented the interests of various constituencies. The Roman republic survived for more than five hundred years, and it was under the republican constitution that Rome established itself as the dominant power in the Mediterranean basin.

The Etruscans and Rome

Romulus and Remus

The city of Rome arose from origins both obscure and humble. According to the ancient legends, the city owed its existence to the flight of Aeneas, a refugee from Troy who migrated to Italy when Greek invaders destroyed his native land. Two of his descendants, the twins Romulus and Remus, almost did not survive infancy because an evil uncle abandoned them by the flooded Tiber River, fully expecting them to drown or die of exposure. But a kindly she-wolf found them and nursed them to health. The boys grew strong and courageous, and in 753 B.C.E. Romulus founded the city of Rome and established himself as its first king.

Modern scholars do not tell so colorful a tale, but they agree that Rome grew from humble beginnings. Beginning about 2000 B.C.E., bands of Indo-European migrants crossed the Alps and settled throughout the Italian peninsula. Like their distant cousins in India, Greece, and northern Europe, these migrants blended with the neolithic inhabitants of the region, adopted agriculture, and established tribal federations. Shepherders and small farmers occupied much of the Italian peninsula, including the



Paintings in Etruscan tombs often represent scenes from daily life. Illustrations in the Tomb of the Leopards in Tarquinia depict musicians playing pipes and lyre during a banquet.

future site of Rome itself. Bronze metallurgy appeared about 1800 B.C.E. and iron about 900 B.C.E.

During the middle centuries of the first millennium B.C.E., Italy underwent rapid political and economic development. The agents of that development were the Etruscans, a dynamic people who dominated much of Italy between the eighth and fifth centuries B.C.E. The Etruscans probably migrated to Italy from Anatolia. They settled first in Tuscany, the region around modern Florence, but they soon controlled much of the territory from the Po River valley in northern Italy to the region around modern Naples in the south. They built thriving cities and established political and economic alliances between their settlements. They manufactured high-quality bronze and iron goods, and they worked gold and silver into jewelry. They built a fleet and traded actively in the western Mediterranean. During the late sixth century B.C.E., however, the Etruscans encountered a series of challenges from other peoples, and their society began to decline. Greek fleets defeated the Etruscans at sea while Celtic peoples attacked them from Gaul (modern France).

The Etruscans deeply influenced the early development of Rome. Like the Etruscan cities, Rome was a monarchy during the early days after its foundation, and several Roman kings were Etruscans. The kings ruled Rome through the seventh and sixth centuries B.C.E., and they provided the city with paved streets, public buildings, defensive walls, and large temples.

Etruscan merchants drew a large volume of traffic to Rome, thanks partly to the city's geographical advantages. Rome enjoyed easy access to the Mediterranean by way

The Etruscans

The Kingdom of Rome



Ruins of the Roman forum, where political leaders conducted public affairs during the era of the republic, still stand today.

of the Tiber River, but since it was not on the coast, it did not run the risk of invasion or attack from the sea. Already during the period of Etruscan dominance, trade routes from all parts of Italy converged on Rome. When Etruscan society declined, Rome was in a strong position to play a more prominent role both in Italy and in the larger Mediterranean world.

The Roman Republic and Its Constitution

Establishment of the Republic

In 509 B.C.E. the Roman nobility deposed the last Etruscan king and replaced the monarchy with an aristocratic republic. At the heart of the city, they built the Roman forum, a political and civic center filled with temples and public buildings where leading citizens tended to government business. They also instituted a republican constitution that entrusted executive responsibilities to two consuls who wielded civil and military power. Consuls were elected by an assembly dominated by hereditary aristocrats and wealthy classes, known in Rome as the patricians, and they served one-year terms. The powerful Senate, whose members were mostly aristocrats with extensive political experience, advised the consuls and ratified all major decisions. Because the consuls and the Senate both represented the interests of the patricians, there was constant tension between the wealthy classes and the common people, known as the plebeians.

Conflicts between Patricians and Plebeians

During the early fifth century B.C.E., relations between the classes became so strained that the plebeians threatened to secede from Rome and establish a rival settlement. To maintain the integrity of the Roman state, the patricians granted plebeians the right to elect officials, known as tribunes, who represented their interests in the Roman government. Originally plebeians chose two tribunes, but the number eventually rose to ten. Tribunes had the power to intervene in all political matters, and they possessed the right to veto measures that they judged unfair.

Although the tribunes provided a voice in government for the plebeians, the patricians continued to dominate Rome. Tensions between the classes persisted for as long as the republic survived. During the fourth century B.C.E., plebeians became eligible



Map 11.1 Expansion of the Roman republic to 146 B.C.E. By the mid-second century B.C.E., the Roman republic controlled extensive territories outside Italy. Consider the ways Roman expansion encouraged interactions and exchanges throughout the Mediterranean region.

to hold almost all state offices and gained the right to have one of the consuls come from their ranks. By the early third century, plebeian-dominated assemblies won the power to make decisions binding on all of Rome. Thus, like fifth-century Athens, republican Rome gradually broadened the base of political participation.

Constitutional compromises eased class tensions, but they did not solve all political problems confronted by the republic. When faced with civil or military crises, the Romans appointed an official, known as a dictator, who wielded absolute power for a term of six months. By providing for strong leadership during times of extraordinary difficulty, the republican constitution enabled Rome to maintain a reasonably stable society throughout most of the republic's history. Meanwhile, by allowing various constituencies a voice in government, the constitution also helped to prevent the emergence of crippling class tensions.

The Expansion of the Republic

While the Romans dealt constructively with internal problems, external challenges mounted. During the fifth century B.C.E., for example, Rome faced threats not only from peoples living in the neighboring hills but also from the Etruscans. Beyond Italy were the Gauls, a powerful Celtic people who on several occasions invaded Italy. Between the fourth and second centuries B.C.E., however, a remarkable expansion of power and influence transformed Rome from a small and vulnerable city-state to the center of an enormous empire.

First the Romans consolidated their position in central Italy. During the fifth and early fourth centuries B.C.E., the Romans founded a large regional state in central Italy at the expense of the declining Etruscans and other neighboring peoples. Their conquests gave them access to the iron industry built by the Etruscans and greatly expanded the amount of land under Roman control.

During the later fourth century, the Romans built on their early conquests and emerged as the predominant power in the Italian peninsula. The Romans secured control of the peninsula partly because they established military colonies in regions

*Expansion in the
Mediterranean*

they overcame and partly because of a generous policy toward the peoples they conquered. Instead of ruling them as vanquished subjects, the Romans often exempted them from taxation and allowed them to govern their internal affairs. Conquered peoples in Italy enjoyed the right to trade in Rome and take Roman spouses. Some gained Roman citizenship and rose to high positions in Roman society. The Romans forbade conquered peoples from making military or political alliances, except with Rome, and required them to provide soldiers and military support. Those policies provided the political, military, and diplomatic support Rome needed to put down occasional rebellions and to dominate affairs throughout the Italian peninsula.

With Italy under its control, Rome began to play a major role in the affairs of the larger Mediterranean basin and to experience conflicts with other Mediterranean powers. The principal power in the western Mediterranean during the fourth and third centuries B.C.E. was the city-state of Carthage, located near modern Tunis. Originally established as a Phoenician colony, Carthage enjoyed a strategic location that enabled it to trade actively throughout the Mediterranean. From the wealth generated by that commerce, Carthage became the dominant political power in north Africa (excluding Egypt), the southern part of the Iberian peninsula, and the western region of grain-rich Sicily as well. Meanwhile, the three Hellenistic empires that succeeded Alexander of Macedon continued to dominate the eastern Mediterranean: the Antigonids ruled Macedon, the Ptolemies ruled Egypt, and the Seleucids included wealthy Syria and Anatolia among their many possessions. The prosperity of the Hellenistic realms supported a thriving network of maritime commerce in the eastern Mediterranean, and as in the case of Carthage, commercial wealth enabled rulers to maintain powerful states and armies.

The Punic Wars

The Romans clashed first with Carthage. Between 264 and 146 B.C.E., they fought three devastating conflicts known as the Punic Wars with the Carthaginians. Friction first arose from economic competition, particularly over Sicily, the most important source of grain in the western Mediterranean. Later on, Romans and Carthaginians struggled for supremacy in the region. The rivalry ended after Roman forces subjected Carthage to a long siege, conquered the city, burned much of it to the ground, and forced some fifty thousand survivors into slavery. The Romans then annexed Carthaginian possessions in north Africa and Iberia—rich in grain, oil, wine, silver, and gold—and used those resources to finance continued imperial expansion.

Shortly after the beginning of the Carthaginian conflict, Rome became embroiled in disputes in the eastern Mediterranean. Conflict arose partly because pirates and ambitious local lords ignored the weakening Hellenistic rulers and threatened regional stability. On several occasions Roman leaders dispatched armies to protect the interests of Roman citizens and merchants, and those expeditions brought them into conflict with the Antigonids and the Seleucids. Between 215 and 148 B.C.E., Rome fought five major wars, mostly in Macedon and Anatolia, against Antigonid and Seleucid opponents. The Romans did not immediately annex lands in the eastern Mediterranean but, rather, entrusted them to allies in the region. Nevertheless, by the middle of the second century B.C.E., Rome clearly ranked as the preeminent power in the eastern as well as the western Mediterranean.

From Republic to Empire

Imperial expansion brought wealth and power to Rome, but wealth and power brought problems as well as benefits. Unequal distribution of wealth aggravated class tensions and gave rise to conflict over political and social policies. Meanwhile, the need to administer conquered lands efficiently strained the capacities of the republican constitu-



Roman expansion depended on well-equipped and highly disciplined military forces. In this detail from Trajan's Column, troops assume the siege formation known as the *testudo* (the "tortoise") by surrounding themselves with their shields to deflect defenders' missiles while approaching city walls.

tion. During the first century B.C.E. and the first century C.E., Roman civil and military leaders gradually dismantled the republican constitution and imposed a centralized imperial form of government on the city of Rome and its empire.

Imperial Expansion and Domestic Problems

In Rome, as in classical China and Greece, patterns of land distribution caused serious political and social tensions. Conquered lands fell largely into the hands of wealthy elites, who organized enormous plantations known as *latifundia*. Because they enjoyed economies of scale and often employed slave labor, owners of *latifundia* operated at lower costs than did owners of smaller holdings, who often had to mortgage their lands or sell out to their wealthier neighbors.

During the second and first centuries B.C.E., relations between the classes became so strained that they led to violent social conflict and civil war. The chief proponents of social reform in the Roman republic were the brothers Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus. Just as Wang Mang, the imperial usurper of the Han dynasty, tried to bring about a redistribution of land resources in classical China, the Gracchi brothers worked to limit the amount of conquered land that any individual could hold. Those whose lands exceeded the limit would lose some of their property, which officials would then allocate to small farmers. Again, as in the case of Wang Mang, the Gracchi had little success because most members of the wealthy and ruling classes considered them dangerous radicals and found ways to stymie their efforts. Indeed, fearing that the brothers might gain influence over Roman affairs, their enemies had them both assassinated—Tiberius in 132 B.C.E. and Gaius in 121 B.C.E.

The experiences of the Gracchi brothers clearly showed that the constitution of the Roman republic, originally designed for a small city-state, might not be suitable for a

The Gracchi Brothers



Civil War

A bust of Julius Caesar depicts a trim conqueror and a canny political leader.

under military occupation, and hunted down his political enemies. After Marius died the following year, Sulla made plans to take his place. In 83 B.C.E. he seized Rome and initiated a grisly slaughter of his enemies. Sulla posted lists naming proscribed individuals whom he labeled enemies of the state, and he encouraged the Roman populace to kill these individuals on sight and confiscate their properties. During a reign of terror that lasted almost five years, Sulla brought about the murder or execution of some ten thousand individuals. By the time Sulla died in 78 B.C.E., he had imposed an extremely conservative legislative program that weakened the influence of the lower classes and strengthened the hand of the wealthy in Roman politics.

Because Sulla's program did not address Rome's most serious social problems, however, it had no chance to succeed over a long term. Latifundia continued to pressure small farmers, who increasingly left the countryside and swelled the ranks of the urban lower classes. Poverty in the cities, especially Rome, led to periodic social eruptions when the price of grain rose or the supply fell. Meanwhile, the urban poor increasingly joined the personal armies of ambitious generals, who themselves posed threats to social and political stability. In this chaotic context Gaius Julius Caesar inaugurated the process by which Rome replaced its republican constitution with a centralized imperial form of government.

The Foundation of Empire

A nephew of the general Marius, Julius Caesar favored liberal policies and social reform. In spite of these well-known political sympathies, he escaped danger during the

large and growing empire. Formal political power remained in the hands of a small, privileged class of people in Rome, and their policies often reflected the interests of their class rather than the concerns of the empire as a whole. For the century following the assassinations of the Gracchi brothers, Roman politicians and generals jockeyed for power and position as they sought to mobilize support. Several military commanders began to recruit personal armies not from the ranks of small farmers—traditionally the core of the Roman army—but from landless rural residents and urban workers. Because these troops had no economic cushion to fall back on, they were intensely loyal to their generals and placed the interests of the army before those of the state. Most important of these generals were Gaius Marius, who sided with social reformers who advocated redistribution of land, and Lucius Cornelius Sulla, a veteran of several foreign campaigns who allied with the conservative and aristocratic classes.

During the early first century B.C.E., Rome fell into civil war. In 87 B.C.E. Marius marched on Rome, placed the city

reign of Sulla and the conservatives who followed him. Caesar's survival was due in some measure to his youth—Sulla and his supporters simply did not consider Caesar to be a serious threat—but partly also to a well-timed excursion to Greece and the eastern Mediterranean. During the decade of the 60s B.C.E., Caesar played an active role in Roman politics. He spent enormous sums of money sponsoring public spectacles—such as battles between gladiators and wild animals—which helped him build a reputation and win election to posts in the republican government. This activity kept him in the public eye and helped to publicize his interest in social reform. During the next decade Caesar led a Roman army to Gaul, which he conquered and brought into the still-growing Roman empire.

The conquest of Gaul helped to precipitate a political crisis. As a result of his military victories, Caesar had become extremely popular in Rome. Conservative leaders sought to maneuver him out of power and regain the initiative for their own programs. Caesar refused to stand aside, and in 49 B.C.E. he turned his army toward Rome. By early 46 B.C.E. he had made himself master of the Roman state and named himself dictator—an office that he claimed for life rather than for the constitutional six-month term. Caesar then centralized military and political functions and brought them under his control. He confiscated property from conservatives and distributed it to veterans of his armies and other supporters. He launched large-scale building projects in Rome as a way to provide employment for the urban poor. He also extended Roman citizenship to peoples in the imperial provinces, and he even appointed Gauls to the Roman Senate.

Caesar's policies pointed the way toward a centralized, imperial form of government for Rome and its possessions, but the consolidation of that government had to wait for a new generation of leaders. Caesar's rule alienated many members of the Roman elite classes, who considered him a tyrant. In 44 B.C.E. they organized a plot to assassinate Caesar and restore the republic. They attacked Caesar and stabbed him to death in the Roman forum, but the restoration of an outmoded form of government was beyond their powers. Instead, they plunged Rome into a fresh round of civil conflict that persisted for thirteen more years.

When the struggles ended, power belonged to Octavian, a nephew and protégé of Julius Caesar and the dictator's adopted son. In a naval battle at Actium in Greece (31 B.C.E.), Octavian defeated his principal rival, Mark Antony, who had joined forces with Cleopatra, last of the Ptolemaic rulers of Egypt. He then moved quickly and efficiently to consolidate his rule. In 27 B.C.E. the Senate bestowed on him the title Augustus, a term with strong religious connotations suggesting the divine or semidivine nature of its holder. During his forty-five years of virtually unopposed rule, Augustus fashioned an imperial government that guided Roman affairs for the next three centuries.

Augustus's government was a monarchy disguised as a republic. Like Julius Caesar, Augustus ruled by centralizing political and military power. Yet he proceeded more cautiously than had his patron: Augustus preserved traditional republican offices and forms of government and included members of the Roman elite in his government. At the same time, though, he fundamentally altered the nature of that government. He accumulated vast powers for himself and ultimately took responsibility for all important governmental functions. He reorganized the military system, creating a new standing army with commanders who owed allegiance directly to the emperor—a reform that eliminated problems caused during the late republic by generals with personal armies. He also was careful to place individuals loyal to him in all important positions. Augustus served as emperor until his death in 14 C.E. During his long reign he stabilized a land racked by civil war and enabled the institutions of empire to take root.

Augustus

Augustus's Administration



In this statue, which emphasizes his civil and military leadership in Rome, Augustus wears the uniform of a Roman general.

Continuing Expansion and Integration of the Empire

During the two centuries following Augustus's rule, Roman armies conquered distant lands and integrated them into a larger economy and society. During republican times Rome already held Italy, Greece, Syria, Gaul, and most of the Iberian peninsula, with small outposts in north Africa and Anatolia. By Augustus's reign imperial holdings included much of southeastern Europe, most of north Africa, including Egypt, and sizable territories in Anatolia and southwest Asia. At its high point, during the early second century C.E., the Roman empire embraced much of Britain as well as a continuous belt of possessions surrounding the Mediterranean and extending to rich agricultural regions inland, including Mesopotamia. After Octavian's conquest of Egypt in 30 B.C.E., Roman forces even made

forays deep into the kingdom of Kush, and for more than three centuries they occupied a stretch of the Nile valley about 110 kilometers (70 miles) south of the river's first cataract near Aswan.

Roman expansion had especially dramatic effects in European lands embraced by the empire. Egypt, Anatolia, Syria, and Mesopotamia had long been sites of complex city-based societies, but Gaul, Germany, Britain, and Spain were sparsely populated lands occupied by cultivators who lived in small villages. When Roman soldiers, diplomats, governors, and merchants began to arrive in large numbers, they stimulated the development of local economies and states. They sought access to resources such as tin, and they encouraged local inhabitants to cultivate wheat, olives, and grapes. Local ruling elites allied with Roman representatives and used the wealth that came into their communities to control natural resources and build states on a much larger scale than ever before. Cities emerged where administrators and merchants conducted their business, and the tempo of European society noticeably quickened: Paris, Lyons, Cologne, Mainz, London, Toledo, and Segovia all trace their origins to Roman times.

Within the boundaries of the Roman empire itself, a long era of peace facilitated economic and political integration from the first to the middle of the third century C.E. Augustus brought peace not only to Rome, by ending the civil disturbances that had plagued the city for more than a century, but also to the empire. His reign inaugurated the era known as the *pax romana* ("Roman peace") that persisted for two and a half centuries. In spite of occasional flare-ups, especially among conquered peoples who resented Roman rule, the *pax romana* facilitated trade and communication throughout the region from Mesopotamia to the Atlantic Ocean.

Like their Persian, Chinese, Indian, and Hellenistic counterparts, the Romans integrated their empire by building networks of transportation and communication. Since

The Pax Romana

Roman Roads



Map 11.2 The Roman empire, ca. 117 C.E. Compare this map of the Roman empire at its height with Map 11.1 showing territories controlled by the Roman republic almost two centuries earlier. How important was the Romans' extensive road network for the maintenance of their enormous empire?

ancient times, Roman engineers have enjoyed a reputation as outstanding road builders. Roman engineers prepared a deep bed for their roads, edged them with curbs, provided for drainage, and then topped them off with large, flat paving stones. Their main roads were 6 to 8 meters (20 to 26 feet) wide—large enough to accommodate two-way traffic—and even roads winding through mountains were 2 to 3 meters (6 to 10 feet) wide. Builders placed milestones along the roads, and the imperial postal system maintained stations for couriers. The roads and postal system permitted urgent travel and messages to proceed with remarkable speed: Tiberius, successor of Augustus as Roman emperor, once traveled 290 kilometers (180 miles) in a single day over Roman roads.

Roads linked all parts of the Roman empire. One notable highway of more than 2,500 kilometers (1,554 miles) stretched along the northeast imperial frontier from the Black Sea to the North Sea, parallel to the Danube and Rhine Rivers. Another road linked Rome to the city of Gades (modern Cadiz) in southern Spain. A road of 4,800 kilometers (2,983 miles) ran parallel to the coast of north Africa, and numerous spurs reached south, enabling merchants and soldiers to range deep into the Sahara desert. Romans also built new roads that facilitated travel and trade in the eastern Mediterranean region. One route linked the port of Berenice on the Red Sea to Alexandria, and others linked the towns and ports of the eastern Mediterranean seaboard to Palmyra, a principal way station of caravan traffic coming west from central Asia. Scholars estimate the combined length of the Roman roads was greater than 80,000 kilometers (50,000 miles).

Under conditions of political stability and the *pax romana*, jurists constructed an elaborate system of law. Romans began a tradition of written law about 450 B.C.E.,

Roman Law

Sources from the Past

Tacitus on Corruption in the Early Roman Empire

Augustus's imperial regime and the pax romana brought peace and stability to the Roman empire, but some contemporaries thought there was a darker side to the new imperial order. Cornelius Tacitus (56–120 C.E.) was a prominent aristocrat and the most important historian of the early Roman empire. In his Annals, written in the early second century C.E., Tacitus did not deny the “gift of peace,” but he deplored the loss of political courage among Roman leaders after the establishment of the imperial regime.

Famous writers have recorded Rome's early glories and disasters. The Augustan Age, too, had its distinguished historians. But then the rising tide of flattery exercised a deterrent effect. The reigns of [Augustus's successors as emperor] Tiberius, Gaius, Claudius, and Nero were described during their lifetimes in fictitious terms, for fear of the consequences; whereas the accounts written after their deaths were influenced by raging animosities. So I have decided to say a little about Augustus, with special attention to his last period, and then go on to the reign of Tiberius [14–37 C.E.] and what followed. . . .

[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 [the replacement of the republic by an imperial form of government], and so now they liked the security of the existing arrangement better than the dangerous uncertainties of the old regime. Besides, the new order was popular in the provinces. There, government by Senate and People was looked upon skeptically as a matter of sparing 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. . . .

Nobody had any immediate worries as long as Augustus retained his physical powers, and kept himself going, and his House, and the peace of the empire. But when old age incapacitated him, his approaching end brought hopes of change. A few people started idly talking of the blessings of freedom [i.e., discussing a return to the republic]. Some, more numerous, feared civil war;

others wanted it. The great majority, however, exchanged critical gossip about candidates for the succession. . . .

Then two pieces of news became known simultaneously: Augustus was dead, and Tiberius was in control.

The new reign's first crime was the assassination of Agrippa Postumus [grandson of Augustus]. He was killed by a staff-officer—who found it a hard task, though he was a persevering murderer and the victim [was] taken by surprise unarmed. Tiberius said nothing about the matter in the senate. He pretended that the orders came from Augustus, who was alleged to have instructed the colonel in charge to kill Agrippa Postumus as soon as Augustus himself was dead. It is true that Augustus' scathing criticisms of the young man's behavior were undoubtedly what had prompted the senate to decree his banishment. But the emperor had never been callous enough to kill any of his relations, and that he should murder his own grandchild to remove the worries of a stepson seemed incredible. It would be nearer the truth to suppose that Tiberius because he was afraid, and Livia [Augustus's widow and mother of Tiberius by another man, but not the grandmother of Agrippa] through stepmotherly malevolence, loathed and distrusted the young Agrippa Postumus and got rid of him at the first opportunity. . . .

Meanwhile at Rome consuls, senate, knights, precipitately became servile. The more distinguished men were, the greater their urgency and insincerity. They must show neither satisfaction at the death of one emperor, nor gloom at the accession of another: so their features were carefully arranged in a blend of tears and smiles, mourning and flattery.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

How might a spokesperson from the Roman imperial court have responded to these views of Tacitus?

SOURCE: Tacitus. *The Annals of Imperial Rome*. Rev. ed. Trans. by Michael Grant. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977, pp. 31–35.



Roman engineers built paved roads far from home. This road served as the main street through the bustling city of Ephesus in Anatolia (modern-day Turkey).

when they promulgated the Twelve Tables as a basic law code for citizens of the early republic. As armies spread Roman influence throughout the Mediterranean, jurists worked to construct a rational body of law that would apply to all peoples under Roman rule. During the late republic and especially during the empire, the jurists articulated standards of justice and gradually applied them throughout Roman territory. They established the principle that defendants were innocent until proven guilty, and they ensured that defendants had a right to challenge their accusers before a judge in a court of law. They also permitted judges to set aside laws that were unfair. Like transportation and communication networks, Roman law helped to integrate the diverse lands that made up the empire, and the principles of Roman law continued to shape Mediterranean and European society long after the empire had disappeared.

Economy and Society in the Roman Mediterranean

The rapid expansion of Roman influence and the imposition of Roman imperial rule brought economic and social changes to peoples throughout the Mediterranean basin. Good roads and the *pax romana* encouraged trade between regions. Existing cities benefited handsomely from the wealth generated by trade, and in the lands they conquered, the Romans founded new cities to serve as links between local regions and the larger Mediterranean economy. Meanwhile, like most other peoples of classical times, the Romans built a strictly patriarchal society and made extensive use of slave labor.

Trade and Urbanization

Commercial Agriculture

Like other classical societies, the Roman Mediterranean experienced economic development and social change as the state expanded and brought new regions into its network of trade and communication. Agricultural production, the economic foundation of the Roman empire, also underwent transformation with the expansion of empire and the growth of trade. Instead of planting crops for immediate local use, owners of *latifundia* concentrated on production for export. Grain from *latifundia* in north Africa, Egypt, and Sicily routinely found its way over the Roman roads and the Mediterranean sea lanes to the large cities of the empire. The ship that Paul of Tarsus boarded at Caesarea, for example, carried several hundred tons of wheat destined for consumers in Rome.

Commercial agriculture played an important role in the economic specialization and integration of the empire. Because it was possible to import grain at favorable prices from lands that routinely produced large surpluses, other regions could concentrate on the cultivation of fruits and vegetables or on the production of manufactured items. Greece, for example, concentrated on olives and grapevines. Syria and Palestine produced fruits, nuts, and wool fabrics. Gaul produced grain, supplied copper, and began to experiment with the cultivation of grapevines. Spain produced high-quality olive oil as well as wine, horses, and most of the precious metal used in the Roman empire. Italy became a center for the production of pottery, glassware, and bronze goods. Archaeologists have uncovered one pottery factory north of Rome that might have employed hundreds of workers and that had a mixing vat capable of holding more than 40,000 liters (10,568 gallons) of clay.

Mediterranean Trade

Specialized production of agricultural commodities and manufactured goods set the stage for vigorous trade. Sea lanes linked ports from Syria and Palestine to Spain and north Africa. Roman military and naval power kept the seas largely free of pirates so that sizable cargoes could move safely over long distances, barring foul weather. Indeed, the Mediterranean became essentially a Roman lake, which the Romans called *mare nostrum* (“our sea”). As Roman military forces, administrators, tax collectors, and other officials traveled throughout the empire carrying out their duties, they joined the merchants in linking the Mediterranean’s regions into a well-integrated network of communication and exchange. Archaeologists have discovered that even in remote rural areas, peasants routinely used high-quality pottery, ate food off fine tableware, consumed wines and oils imported from afar, and slept under tiled roofs.

The City of Rome

Cities benefited handsomely from Mediterranean integration and played a prominent role in promoting economic and social change. Along with taxes, tributes, booty, and other wealth generated by military expansion, much of the profit from Mediterranean trade flowed to Rome, where it fueled remarkable urban development. In the first century C.E., some ten thousand statues decorated the city, along with seven hundred pools, five hundred fountains, and thirty-six monumental marble arches celebrating military victories and other achievements. The Roman state financed the construction of temples, bathhouses, public buildings, stadiums, and perhaps most important of all, aqueducts that brought fresh water into the city from the neighboring mountains. Construction projects benefited from the use of concrete, invented by Roman engineers during the republican era, which strengthened structures and allowed builders to meet high standards of precision required for plumbing and water control.

Construction provided employment for hundreds of thousands of workers. As a result, the population of Rome surged, and the city’s economy experienced rapid growth. Shopkeepers, artisans, merchants, and bankers proliferated in the imperial capital. Economic development attracted large numbers of migrants from the country-



A wall painting from Stabiae (a small community near Pompeii destroyed by the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 c.e.) depicts an Italian harbor with ships, wharves, warehouses, markets, and decorative columns topped by statues.

side and from foreign lands. Most received low wages as laborers, construction workers, or servants, but those with skills sometimes found good employment as craftsmen. Some who went to Rome with a bit of money established successful businesses, and by hard work or good fortune, a few entrepreneurs became wealthy and respected businessmen.

Urban growth and development also took place beyond the capital. Some parts of the empire, such as Greece and Syria, had long-standing urban traditions. There trade and economic development brought additional prosperity. Elsewhere the Romans founded cities at strategic sites for purposes of government and administration, especially in Spain, Gaul, and Britain, which encouraged economic and social development at the far reaches of the empire.

As wealth concentrated in the cities, urban residents came to expect a variety of comforts not available in rural areas. Merchants traveling the roads and sea lanes brought delicacies and luxury items from all parts of the Roman empire: Spanish hams, oysters from British waters, fine wool cloaks from Gaul, and Syrian nuts, dates, and figs all made their way to consumers in Rome and other prosperous cities. Roman cities enjoyed abundant supplies of fresh water, sometimes brought from distant mountains

*Roman Cities and
Their Attractions*



Many Roman aqueducts survive to the present day. This one carried water to the city of Nemausus in Gaul (modern Nîmes in France). The water flowed through a trough supported by the top layer of arches.

by aqueducts, and elaborate sewage and plumbing systems. All sizable cities and even many smaller towns had public baths featuring hot and cold rooms, and often swimming pools and gymnasia as well. Underground sewers carried away wastewater.

Enormous circuses, stadiums, and amphitheaters provided sites for the entertainment of the urban masses. Circuses were oval structures with tracks for chariot races, which were wildly popular in the Roman empire. The Circus Maximus at Rome accommodated about 250,000 spectators. Entertainment in stadiums often took forms now considered coarse and cruel—battles to the death between gladiators or between humans and wild animals—but urban populations flocked to such events, which they looked on as exciting diversions from daily routine. The Roman Colosseum, a magnificent marble stadium and sports arena opened in 80 C.E., provided seating for about 50,000 spectators. The structure had a multicolored awning that protected viewers from sun and rain, and its construction was so precise that it was possible to flood the arena with water and stage mock naval battles within its walls.

Family and Society in Roman Times

The Paterfamilias

Roman law vested immense authority in male heads of families. The Roman family consisted of an entire household, including slaves, free servants, and close relatives who lived together. Usually the eldest male ruled the household as *paterfamilias* (“father of the family”). Roman law gave the paterfamilias the authority to arrange marriages for his children, determine the work or duties they would perform, and punish them for offenses as he saw fit. He had rights also to sell them into slavery and even to execute them.



From the days of the republic, residents of Rome consumed subsidized grain imported from distant territories. In this painting from a tomb, workers load grain onto a boat at the port of Ostia, at the mouth of the Tiber River, for transport upriver to the city of Rome.

Although legally endowed with extraordinary powers, the Roman paterfamilias rarely ruled tyrannically over his charges. In fact, women usually supervised domestic affairs in Roman households, and by the time they reached middle age, women generally wielded considerable influence within their families. They helped select marriage partners for their offspring, and they sometimes played large roles in managing their families' financial affairs. Although Roman law placed strict limits on the ability of women to receive inheritances, enforcement was inconsistent, and clever individuals found ways to evade the law or take advantage of its loopholes. During the third and second centuries B.C.E., as Roman expansion in the Mediterranean brought wealth to the capital, women came to possess a great deal of property. By the first century B.C.E., in spite of the authority legally vested in the paterfamilias, many women supervised the financial affairs of family businesses and wealthy estates.

Increasing wealth had important consequences for Roman society. New classes of merchants, landowners, and construction contractors accumulated enormous private wealth and rivaled the old nobility for prominence. The newly rich classes built palatial houses with formal gardens and threw lavish banquets with rare and exotic foods such as boiled ostrich, parrot-tongue pie, and tree fungus served in a sauce of fish fat, jellyfish, and eggs. While wealthy classes probed culinary frontiers, cultivators and urban masses subsisted largely on porridge and vegetables occasionally supplemented by eggs, fish, sausage, or meat.

By the first century B.C.E., poverty had become a considerable problem in Rome and other large cities of the empire. Often unemployed, the urban masses sometimes rioted to express their dissatisfaction and seek improved conditions, and they readily provided recruits for private armies of ambitious generals such as Marius and Sulla. Imperial authorities never developed a true urban policy but, rather, sought to keep the masses contented with “bread and circuses”—subsidized grain and spectacular public entertainments.

Roman society made extensive use of slave labor: by the second century C.E., slaves may have represented as much as one-third of the population of the Roman empire. In the countryside they worked mostly on latifundia, though many labored in state quarries and mines. Rural slaves worked under extremely harsh conditions, often chained together in teams. Discontent among rural slaves led to several large-scale revolts,

Wealth and Social Change

Slavery



A relief carving on a Roman monument depicts some slaves serving guests at a banquet (above), while others work in the kitchen (below).

especially during the second and first centuries B.C.E. During the most serious uprising, in 73 B.C.E., the escaped slave Spartacus assembled an army of seventy thousand rebellious slaves. The Roman army dispatched eight legions, comprising more than forty thousand well-equipped, veteran troops, to quell the revolt.

In the cities, conditions were much less difficult than in the countryside. Female slaves commonly worked as domestic servants while males toiled as servants, laborers, craftsmen, shopkeepers, or business agents for their owners. Slaves who had an education or possessed some particular talent had the potential to lead comfortable lives. The first-century Anatolian slave Epictetus even became a prominent Stoic philosopher. He spent much of his life studying with Rome's leading intellectuals, and he lectured to large audiences that included high Roman officials and perhaps even emperors.

More than their counterparts in rural areas, urban slaves could hope for manumission as a reward for a long term of loyal service: it was common, though not mandatory, for masters to free urban slaves about the time they reached age thirty. Until freed, however, slaves remained under the strict authority of their masters, who had the right to sell them, arrange their family affairs, punish them, and even execute them for serious offenses.

The Cosmopolitan Mediterranean

The integration of the Mediterranean basin had important effects not only for the trade and economy of the Roman empire but also for its cultural and religious traditions. As travelers ventured throughout the Mediterranean basin, they became ac-

quainted with other cultural and religious traditions. When migrants moved to Rome and other large cities, they often continued to observe their inherited traditions and thus contributed to the cosmopolitan cultural atmosphere of the empire. Roads and communication networks favored the spread of new popular religions. Most important of these over time was Christianity, which originated as a small and persecuted Jewish sect. Within three centuries, however, Christianity had become the official religion of the Roman empire and the predominant faith of the Mediterranean basin.

Greek Philosophy and Religions of Salvation

During the early days of their history, the Romans recognized many gods and goddesses, who they believed intervened directly in human affairs. Jupiter was the principal god, lord of the heavens. Mars was the god of war, Ceres the goddess of grain, Janus the god who watched the threshold of individual houses, and Vesta the goddess of the hearth. In addition to these major deities, most Roman households also honored tutelary deities, gods who looked after the welfare of individual families.

As the Romans expanded their political influence and built an empire, they encountered the religious and cultural traditions of other peoples. Often they adopted the deities of other peoples and used them for their own purposes. From the Etruscans, for example, they learned of Juno, the moon goddess, and Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, as well as certain religious practices, such as divination of the future through examination of the internal organs of ritually sacrificed animals.

The Romans also drew inspiration from the Greek tradition of rational thought and philosophy. When the Romans established political hegemony in the eastern Mediterranean in the third and second centuries B.C.E., the most prominent school of thought in Hellenistic Greece was Stoicism. Recognizing that they lived in a large and interdependent world, the Stoics sought to identify a set of universal moral standards based on nature and reason that would transcend local ethical codes.

That approach to moral thought appealed strongly to Roman intellectuals, and thinkers such as Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 B.C.E.) readily adopted Stoic values. Cicero studied in Greece and became thoroughly acquainted with both classical and Hellenistic schools of thought. He was a persuasive orator, and he wrote clear, elegant, polished Latin prose. In adapting Hellenistic thought to Roman needs, Cicero drew heavily from the Stoics' moral and ethical teachings. His letters and treatises emphasized the individual's duty to live in accordance with nature and reason. He argued that the pursuit of justice was the individual's highest public duty, and he scorned those who sought to accumulate wealth or to become powerful through immoral, illegal, or unjust means. Through his speeches and especially his writings, Cicero helped to establish Stoicism as the most prominent school of moral philosophy in Rome.

While educated thinkers drew inspiration from the Greeks, the masses found comfort in religions of salvation that established their presence throughout the Mediterranean basin and beyond. Like Stoicism, these religions clearly reflected the political and social conditions of the Hellenistic period: in an imperial era, when close-knit city-states no longer served as a focus for individual loyalties, religions of salvation appealed to the popular masses by providing a sense of purpose and the promise of a glorious future existence.

These religions became prominent features of Mediterranean society during Hellenistic times and became increasingly noticeable in Rome during the late republic as migrants settled in the capital and brought their faiths with them. Under the Roman empire, religions of salvation flourished both in Rome and throughout the Mediterranean basin. Merchants, soldiers, and administrators carried their cults as

Roman Deities

Greek Influence

Cicero and Stoicism

Religions of Salvation



A wall painting of the fourth century C.E. from a Christian catacomb depicts a group of pagan students gathered around their teacher, who presents a lesson in anatomy with the aid of a cadaver. This scene reflects the influence of Greek scientific and medical studies in the Roman empire.

they conducted their business, and missionaries traveled alongside them in search of converts. The roads of the empire and the sea lanes of the Mediterranean thus served not only as trade routes and lines of official communication but also as highways for religions of salvation, which traveled to all the ports and large cities of the empire.

Mithraism

Among the most popular of these religions of salvation was the cult dedicated to the Persian deity Mithras. In Zoroastrian mythology, Mithras was a god closely identified with the sun and light. Roman soldiers serving in the Hellenistic world, particularly Anatolia, encountered the cult of Mithras and adapted it to their interests. They associated Mithras less with the sun than with military virtues such as strength, courage, and discipline, and the cult of Mithras quickly became exceptionally popular among the Roman armed forces.

The Mithraic religion provided divine sanction for human life and especially for purposeful moral behavior. It brought together a community that welcomed and nurtured like-minded individuals. Further, it offered hope for individuals who conscientiously observed the cult's teachings by promising them ecstatic and mysterious union with Mithras himself. During the late republic, Mithraic altars and temples ap-

Mithraism (MITH-rah-iz'm)



This mithraeum—a shrine to the god Mithras—survives beneath the church of San Clemente in Rome. Benches accommodated worshippers. The sculpture on the altar depicts Mithras sacrificing a bull to the god Apollo.

peared in military garrisons throughout the empire. During the early centuries C.E., administrators and merchants also became enchanted with Mithras, and his cult attracted followers among the male populations of all sizable communities and commercial centers in the Roman empire.

The cult of Mithras did not admit women, but cults dedicated to the Anatolian mother goddess Cybele, the Egyptian goddess Isis, and other deities made a place for both men and women. Indeed, the cult of Isis may have been the most popular of all the Mediterranean religions of salvation before the rise of Christianity. Devotees built temples to Isis throughout the Roman empire, and they adored the Egyptian goddess as a benevolent and protective deity who nurtured her worshipers and helped them cope with the stresses of life in cosmopolitan society. Like the Mithraic religion, the cult of Isis and other religions of salvation attracted followers in Rome and other cities throughout the Mediterranean basin. The immense popularity of these religions of salvation provides a context that helps to explain the remarkable success of Christianity in the Roman empire.

Cult of Isis

Judaism and Early Christianity

After the dissolution of the Jewish kingdom of David and Solomon in the tenth century B.C.E., the Jewish people maintained their faith and their communities under various imperial regimes: Babylonian, Achaemenid, Alexandrian, Seleucid, and Roman. All these empires embraced many different ethnic and religious groups and mostly tolerated the cultural preferences of their subjects, providing that communities paid their taxes and refrained from rebellious activities. In an effort to encourage political loyalty, these empires often created state cults that honored their emperors as gods, and they sometimes called for subjects to participate in the cults and revere the emperor-gods.

The Jews and the Empire

That requirement created a serious problem for the strictly monotheistic Jews, who recognized only their god, Yahweh, as divine. Jews considered the pretensions of the

state cults to be blasphemy, and many of them refused to pay homage to a mortal being who laid claim to divinity. Sometimes they even declined to pay taxes to regimes that required subjects to revere their emperors. Relations between Jews and imperial authorities became especially tense as the Romans extended their empire in the eastern Mediterranean region. Between the third century B.C.E. and the first century C.E., Jews in Palestine mounted several rebellions against their Seleucid and Roman overlords. Ultimately the resistance failed, and Roman forces decisively defeated the rebels during the Jewish War of 66 to 70 C.E.

The Essenes

While some Jews actively fought the Romans, others founded new sects that looked for saviors to deliver them from subjection. The Essenes formed one such sect. In 1947 shepherds accidentally discovered some Essene writings known as the Dead Sea scrolls, which have shed fascinating light on the sect and its beliefs. The Essenes formed their community in Palestine during the first century B.C.E. They observed a strict moral code and participated in rituals designed to reinforce a sense of community: they admitted new members after a rite of baptism in water, and they took part in ritual community meals. They also looked for a savior who would deliver them from Roman rule and lead them in the establishment of a community in which they could practice their faith without interference.

Jesus of Nazareth

The early Christians probably had little contact with the Essenes, but they shared many of the same concerns. The Christians formed their community around Jesus of Nazareth, a charismatic Jewish teacher whom they recognized as their savior. Born about the year 4 B.C.E., Jesus grew up at a time of high tension between Roman overlords and their Jewish subjects. He was a peaceful man who taught devotion to God and love for fellow human beings. He attracted large crowds because of a reputation for wisdom and miraculous powers, especially the ability to heal the sick.

Yet Jesus alarmed the Romans because he also taught that “the kingdom of God is at hand.” To Jesus, the kingdom of God may well have referred to a spiritual realm in which God would gather those faithful to him. To Roman administrators, however, his message carried political overtones: an impending kingdom of God sounded like a threat to Roman rule in Palestine, especially since enthusiastic crowds routinely accompanied Jesus. In an effort to forestall a new round of rebellion, Roman administrators executed Jesus by fixing him to a cross in the early 30s C.E.

Jesus’ Early Followers

Jesus’ crucifixion did not put an end to his movement. Even after his execution Jesus’ close followers strongly felt his presence and proclaimed that he had triumphed over death by rising from his grave. They called him “Christ,” meaning “the anointed one,” the savior who would bring individuals into the kingdom of God. They taught that he was the son of God and that his sacrifice served to offset the sins of those who had faith in him. They taught further that like Jesus, the faithful would survive death and would experience eternal life in the spiritual kingdom of God. Following Jesus’ teachings, the early Christians observed a demanding moral code and devoted themselves uncompromisingly to God. They also compiled a body of writings—accounts of Jesus’ life, reports of his followers’ works, and letters outlining Christian teachings—that gained recognition as the New Testament. Together with the Jews’ Hebrew scriptures, which Christians referred to as the Old Testament, the New Testament became the holy book of Christianity.

Paul of Tarsus

Jesus and his earliest followers were all Jews. Beginning about the middle of the first century C.E., however, some Christians avidly sought converts from non-Jewish communities in the Hellenistic world and the Roman empire. The principal figure in the expansion of Christianity beyond Judaism was Paul of Tarsus, a Jew from Anatolia who zealously preached his faith, especially in the Greek-speaking eastern region of the Roman empire. Paul taught a Christianity that attracted the urban masses in the

Sources from the Past

Jesus' Moral and Ethical Teachings

Several accounts of Jesus' life record the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus challenged his followers to honor God and observe a demanding code of ethics. Here Jesus explicitly instructed his listeners to reject moral and legal principles that southwest Asian peoples had followed since the third millennium B.C.E. and that the Babylonian emperor Hammurabi had enshrined in his famous code of laws about 1750 B.C.E. Jesus enjoined them to refrain from revenge against those who had caused them harm, for example, and instead to repay harm with kindness.

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness's sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven. . . .

Ye have heard that it hath been said, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." But I say unto you that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him two. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy." But I say

SOURCE: Matthew 5:3–13, 5:38–45, 7:7–12 (Authorized Version). (Translation slightly modified.)

unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. . . .

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

Compare and contrast Jesus' moral teachings with the Zoroastrian, Confucian, Daoist, Buddhist, Hindu, and Socratic views discussed in earlier chapters.

same way as other religions of salvation that spread widely in the Roman empire. His doctrine called for individuals to observe high moral standards and to place their faith ahead of personal and family interests. His teaching also explained the world and human history as the results of God's purposeful activity and so provided a framework of meaning for individuals' lives. Furthermore, Paul's doctrine promised a glorious future existence for those who conscientiously observed the faith.

Like missionaries of other faiths, Paul was no stranger to Roman roads and Mediterranean sea lanes. He traveled widely in search of converts and made several journeys through Greece, Anatolia, Syria, and Palestine to visit fledgling Christian communities and offer them guidance. His last journey took him by ship from Palestine to Rome,

*Early Christian
Communities*

where he took the opportunity to promote Christianity and seek converts for about two years before losing his appeal to the emperor and suffering execution.

For two centuries after the crucifixion of Jesus, there was no central authority for the fledgling church. Rather, individual communities selected supervisors, known as bishops, who oversaw priests and governed their jurisdictions according to their best understanding of Christian doctrine. As a result, until the emergence of Rome as the principal seat of church authority in the third century C.E., Christians held doctrinal views and followed practices that varied considerably from one community to the next: as different groups of people adopted Christianity, they interpreted Christian teachings in very different ways, just as different communities had earlier understood the cults of Mithras, Isis, and other deities in their own ways.

Early Christians generated a large number of writings to express their various understandings of Christianity and its implications. After the third century C.E., church authorities suppressed many of those writings and declared them heretical. Yet dozens of letters, gospels, and interpretative historical accounts survive to document the complexity and diversity of early Christian teachings. Some early Christians maintained that the faithful must accept specific doctrines, whereas others encouraged believers to find truth within themselves and express it in their own ways. Some religious leaders taught that Jesus had literally risen from the dead and come back to life, whereas others held that his resurrection was a spiritual rather than physical matter. Some communities forbade women to play active public roles in the church, but others allowed women to serve as priests. Some congregations permitted individuals to seek their own understanding of spiritual matters, but others insisted that access to spiritual truth was available only through properly ordained priests and bishops. Early Christianity was indeed a remarkably diverse faith. Only gradually did believers agree to recognize certain texts—the New Testament—as authoritative scripture and adopt them as fundamental guides for Christian doctrine and practice.

*The Growth of
Early Christianity*

Like the Jews from whose ranks they had sprung, the early Christians refused to honor the Roman state cults or revere the emperor as a god. As a result, Roman imperial authorities launched sporadic campaigns of persecution designed to eliminate Christianity as a threat to the empire. In spite of that repression, Christian numbers grew rapidly. During the first three centuries of the faith's existence, Christianity found its way to almost all parts of the Roman empire, and Christians established thriving communities throughout the Mediterranean basin and farther east in Mesopotamia and Iran. Rome itself had a sizable Christian population by 300 C.E.

The remarkable growth of Christianity reflected the new faith's appeal particularly to the lower classes, urban populations, and women. Christianity accorded honor and dignity to individuals who did not enjoy high standing in Roman society, and it endowed them with a sense of spiritual freedom more meaningful than wealth, power, or social prominence. Unlike the popular cult of Mithras, which admitted only men, Christianity taught the spiritual equality of the sexes and welcomed the contributions of both men and women. Like Mithraism and other religions of salvation, Christianity provided a sense of purpose and a promise of future glory for those who placed their faith in Jesus. Thus, although Christianity originated as a minor sect of Judaism, urban populations in the Roman empire embraced the new faith with such enthusiasm that by the third century C.E. it had become the most dynamic and influential religious faith in the Mediterranean basin.

Under Roman influence Mediterranean lands became a tightly integrated society. The Roman empire provided a political structure that administered lands as distant as Mesopotamia and Britain. Highly organized trade networks enabled peoples throughout the empire to concentrate on specialized agricultural or industrial production and to import foods and other goods that they did not produce themselves. Popular religions spread widely and attracted enthusiastic converts. Like Confucianism and Buddhism in classical China and India, rational philosophy and Christianity became prominent sources of intellectual and religious authority in the classical Mediterranean and continued to influence cultural development in the Mediterranean, Europe, and southwest Asia over the long term.

CHRONOLOGY

753 B.C.E.	Founding of Rome, according to tradition
509 B.C.E.	Establishment of the Roman republic
264–146 B.C.E.	Roman expansion in the Mediterranean basin
106–43 B.C.E.	Life of Marcus Tullius Cicero
first century B.C.E.	Civil war in Rome
46–44 B.C.E.	Rule of Gaius Julius Caesar as dictator
31 B.C.E.–14 C.E.	Rule of Augustus
4 B.C.E.–early 30s C.E.	Life of Jesus of Nazareth
first century C.E.	Life of Paul of Tarsus
66–70 C.E.	Jewish War

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