CHAPTER II

ROME

FROM THE 6TH CENTURY BC TO THE 5TH CENTURY AD

2 ROME AND THE MEDITERRANEAN WORLD AT THE DEATH OF ALEXANDER (323 BC)

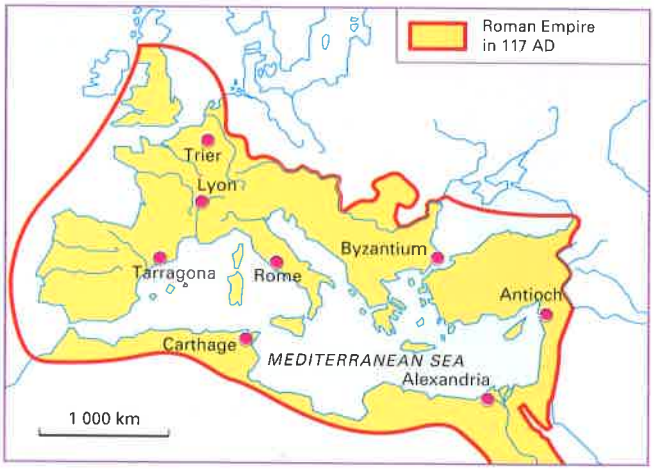
More than a thousand years elapsed between the founding of Rome (traditionally dated 753 BC) and the fall of the Roman Empire of the West in AD 476. This was the Roman millennium. It can be looked at in three stages.

To begin with, at a time when Greek civilization was still flourishing, there came into being, at the cost of efforts and setbacks, the first of the universal empires to affect the greater part of Europe: the Roman Empire. How was it that a small group of villages in Latium could create the metropolis of a world that was centred on the Mediterranean but reached from Scotland to Mesopotamia and from the Sahara to the Carpathians?

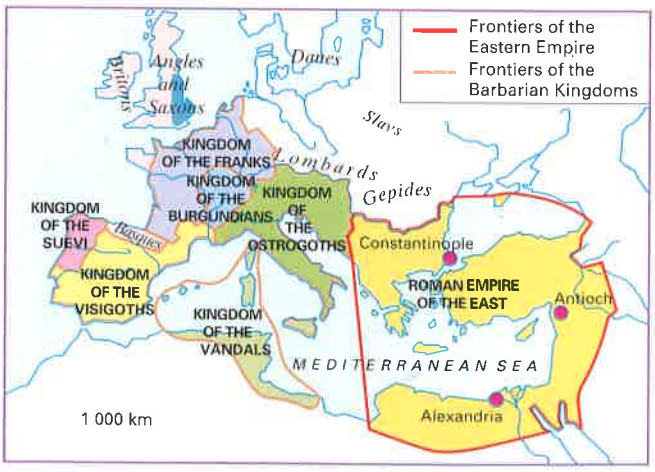
We should look, secondly, at the Empire in its heyday, at the beginning of the 2nd century AD in the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian, to study the content of Roman civilization. As a unifying force it left its mark on Europe, more in some regions than in others, but most often indelibly.

Finally, the Empire slowly and insidiously disintegrated as the Germanic kingdoms emerged. Their rise was linked to the fitful weakening of Rome's dynamism and especially of its ability to absorb foreign peoples on either side of its frontiers. Contacts with these nomadic tribes was often peaceful; but some violent episodes in many areas justified the term 'Great Invasions'. Yet the memory of Rome's imperial greatness lingered on, partly sustained by the survival of the (Byzantine) Roman Empire in the East. The continuing prestige was what made possible the Empire's revival in the West by Charlemagne and Otto the Great.

3 THE ROMAN EMPIRE AT THE DEATH OF TRAJAN (117 AD)



4 THE BARBARIAN KINGDOMS (c. 500 AD)



1 From the Seven Hills to Universal Empire

1 AENEAS AND ANCHISES
Villa Giulia Museum, Rome. Terracotta from the 5th century BC found at Veii, near Rome
On the terrible night when the Greeks burned Troy, Aeneas obeyed his mother Venus and fled, carrying his sick father on his shoulders. Thus began the incredible voyage described by Virgil in the Aeneid (1st century BC). After seven years of wandering in the Mediterranean, Aeneas reached the Italian coast at the mouth of the Tiber. He brought there the Trojan gods, gave his people the name of Latins and left it to his son to found Rome. The date and origin of this work show how old was the tradition that the Latins were descendants of the Trojans.

2 THE ROMAN SHE-WOLF
Roman coin, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Cabinet des Médailles
According to legend, it was on the site of Rome that the she-wolf, sent by the god Mars, suckled Romulus and Remus.

A marsh surrounded by hills – traditionally seven, but actually more; a river, the Tiber, faster flowing than now and with easily watched crossing-points: such was the site of Rome. Strategically, it was well placed; but that alone cannot account for the Eternal City's exceptional role.

An Etruscan city

For many reasons, the origins of Rome remain obscure. Those who first described its creation were already writing several centuries later. No Roman histories earlier than the 1st century BC have survived, and the earliest date from the time when Augustus was establishing the Empire, a political system that was in fact new, but which he wanted to present as the 'restoration' of Rome's glorious past. Thus, the *Aeneid*, the epic poem by Virgil (70–19 BC) in honour of Rome, develops the myth that the Latins were descended from the Trojans – giving the city's founder Romulus both heroic and divine ancestry. The *History of Rome* by Livy (54 BC to AD 19) is similarly biased in its praise of the Romans' extraordinary qualities.

This blend of history and legend, long accepted at face value, was totally rejected by the systematic criticism of late 19th-century historians. Today's experts are more guarded in their approach. Archaeological research on the oldest parts of Rome – in the Forum, on the Palatine and on sites further afield – has shown after nearly a century that these stories, although more or less mythical, reflected historical realities. While defective on the details of events, they none the less revealed their deeper meaning.

Archaeologists, for example, date the earliest remains of habitats found on the Palatine no earlier than the mid-8th century BC, thereby confirming the traditional date of 753 for the foundation of Rome. But at that time it was not a town: there were simply villages of a few huts, whose shallow foundations have been found dug into the ground.

In Book I of his *History of Rome* (9–13), Livy tells the well-known story of the rape of the Sabine women by the Romans, anxious for heirs, followed by the war between the Sabines and Rome, and then their reconciliation – the Sabine women having interceded between their fathers and their husbands – and finally the fusion of the two peoples. The passage shows the place occupied by women in Rome, admittedly inferior in

law, but wholly responsible as guarantors of the agreement that ended the struggle. The text also bears witness to the fact that very diverse peoples met here – the Latins from the coastal plain, the Sabines from the surrounding mountains.

Other passages show the still greater importance of the Etruscans. For them control of Rome's strategic position was essential to safeguard their communications with Campania, which they had conquered. It is certain, in fact, that Rome was ruled by Etruscan kings at the end of the 7th century BC or during the 6th. It was they who turned its league of villages into a town. They surrounded it with ramparts (attributed to King Servius Tullius); they replaced the mud and thatch huts with stone houses; they drained the original marsh by means of a sewer, the *Cloaca Maxima* and they established in its place the Forum, a public square which became the political and economic centre of the city and later that of the ancient world as a whole.

Still clearer was the mark the Etruscans left on Roman religion. The faithful must seek the favour of the omnipresent gods by trying to understand the signs that were sent them – observing the flight of birds or the entrails of sacrificial victims.

No less decisive a legacy was writing. The Latin alphabet is derived from the Etruscan. The importance of this can be seen from the fact that Roman letters have since been adopted in most of Europe and a large part of the world.

The Roman Republic

Halted in the south by Greek resistance and threatened in the north by the Celtic invasion of the Po valley – then known as Cisalpine Gaul, Etruria declined. Rome seized the opportunity to throw off Etruscan domination, incarnated by the royal family of the Tarquins. The establishment of the Republic in 509 was a turning-point in the history of Rome: henceforth the idea of monarchy had no place in Roman political thought. But the word 'Republic' should not be misunderstood. Like the Tyrannies of the earlier Greek city-states, the monarchy enjoyed popular backing: the establishment of the Republic was a victory for the aristocracy.

Contrary to the view expressed by the Roman annalists, social strife between patricians and plebeians did not date from the foundation of Rome. It was at the end of the 6th century that the most prominent families, the *gentes*, who claimed to be really or metaphorically descended from the highest in the land, rallied around them a large clientele and succeeded in distancing themselves from those whose origins were obscure and who had only numbers on their side: i.e., the *plebs*.

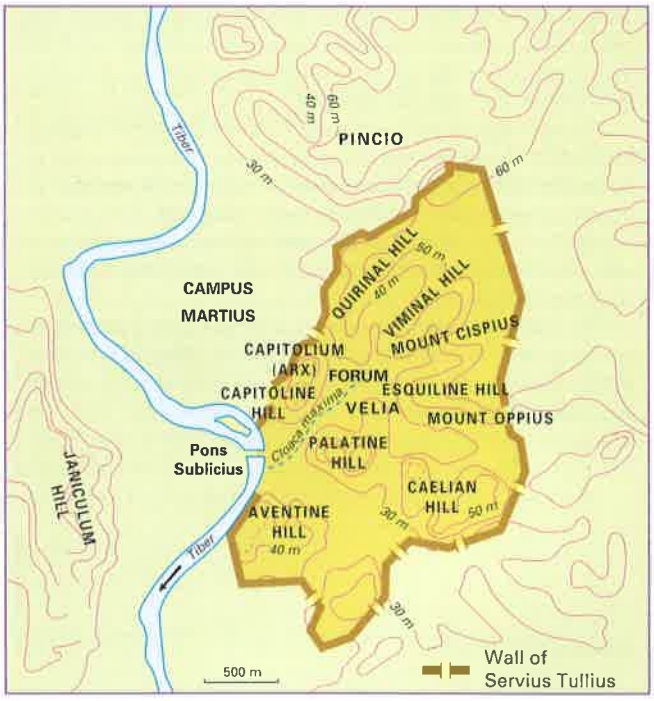
3 The founding of Rome

When founding Rome, Romulus followed the 'Etruscan ritual', tracing its boundary but cutting a furrow with a ploughshare, thereby fixing the Pomerium *or forbidden zone which ensured the city the protection of the gods.*

. . . This done, the founder of the city taketh a plough, to which he fastened a culter or ploughshare of brass and, so yoked in the plough an ox and a cow, he himself holding the plough did make round about the compass of the city a deep furrow. Those which followed him, had the charge to throw the turfs of earth inward into the city, which the ploughshare had raised up, and not to leave any of them turned outward. The furrow thus cast up was the whole compass of their wall, which they call in Latin Pomerium, *by shortening of the syllables, for* post murum*: to wit, after wall. But in the place where they determined to make a gate, they did take off the ploughshare, and draw the plough, with leaving a certain space of earth unbroken up: whereupon the Romans think all the compass of their walls holy and sacred, except their gates. For if their gates had been hallowed and sanctified, they would have had a conscience through them to have brought in, or carried out of the city, any things necessary for the life of man, that had not been pure and clean.*

Plutarch, *Life of Romulus*, translated by Sir Thomas North, 1579; J. M. Dent, London, 1898, Vol. I, pp. 105–6

4 ROME WHEN THE REPUBLIC BEGAN



1 THE VOTING BRIDGE

Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. Cabinet des Médailles

In the 2nd century BC *Rome adopted the secret written ballot. To avoid pressure from petitioners, every citizen in turn crossed a bridge into the* septum, *where he was given a wooden token on which he scratched the sign indicating yes or no before dropping it into the ballot-box.*

2 The Roman Constitution

Polybius (c.200–c.125/120 BC) was the first Greek historian to have centred his historical writings on Rome, where he lived for sixteen years, at first as a detainee but later as an admirer. His description of the Roman constitution remains a model of its kind.

. . . Three systems, aristocracy, monarchy and democracy, coexisted in the Roman Republic, each given so exactly equal a share and all working so well for the administration, that no one could say with certainty, even in Rome itself, whether the Republic was an aristocracy, a monarchy or a democracy. How could they? The power of the consuls made it look like a monarchy; that of the Senate suggested an aristocracy; while the power of the people made it seem like a democratic State . . . .

The consuls, when they were not commanding the army but were working in Rome, were masters of all public affairs. The other public officials were their obedient subordinates, with the exception of the tribunes. As regards preparing and waging war, their power was virtually absolute.

The main task of the Senate was to administer public finance. It supervised both income and expenditure. If a mission had to be sent to settle a quarrel, to request or command something, to accept a surrender or declare war, only the Senate was competent to act. When foreign ambassadors came to Rome, it also had the task of deciding how to act with them and what response to make.

The people . . . were the masters when it came to passing or rejecting laws and declaring war or peace. They alone could judge alliances, truces and treaties, confirming them or declaring them null and void.

Polybius, *Histories*, VI

Such was the identity of the patriciate, the élite of the *gentes*, which monopolized power.

The *plebs* defended itself against the pretensions of this caste and even went so far as to secede on the Aventine Hill in 494 BC, setting up a plebeian city alongside the patrician city.

Little by little, however, matters evolved. The patriciate allowed the *plebs* a limited role in the city's political life. In the middle of the 5th century BC the Law of the Twelve Tables – a kind of legal code, no doubt inscribed on bronze tablets erected in the Forum – revealed a new frame of mind. Even if what remains of its content seems largely to favour the aristocrats, the fact that there was now a corpus of written law, 'the source of all public and private law' as Livy called it (*History of Rome*, III, 34, 6), marked considerable progress. Roman law was immensely influential: its principles are still applied in Europe and the world today.

The institutions of the Roman Republic were based on a relative separation of powers and on mutual control by the different organs of government. The *Comitia* or People's Assembly elected the public officials and voted laws, sometimes involving plebiscites; but, although it appeared democratic, it was dominated by the rich.

The public officials wielded executive power. To prevent a disguised return to monarchy, they were appointed for one year only, not renewable and they had to act as a collegiate body. Gradually there came to be a system of seniority, the *cursus honorum*: to make a career, one had first to be a *quaestor* (handling the budget), then *aedile* (municipal administrator), then *praetor* (judge), then *consul* in charge of general policy and in command of the armies.

Alongside this *cursus* the Tribunes of the Plebs, established in 494 BC and limited to plebeian members, enjoyed an inviolable right of veto on decisions by other public officials.

The *Senate*, composed of former officials, remained aristocratic. It was a key body in the government of Rome.

A hereditary aristocracy, the rising power of money, 'outsiders' seeking a role: these three competing forces in European history were already present in the Roman Republic. The balance between them did not survive the results of Rome's conquests.

Rome's conquests: Rome and Italy (5th and 4th centuries BC)

It was by no means obvious that Rome would become a great power. Until the mid-4th century BC the Senate, which was in charge of foreign policy, had shown great caution and rejected any

idea of foreign adventures. Indeed, it had had to face immediate danger, owing to the presence of rival Latin or Etruscan cities like Veii, 17 kilometres to the north, as well as the pressure from mountain-dwellers descending on the coastal plains. While this was the traditional rivalry between shepherds and settled farmers, there was also, from 390 to 386 BC, a raid on Rome by Gauls from northern Italy, who captured all of the city except for the Capitol.

When Rome sent its legions against the Samnites towards the end of the 4th century BC, it seemed a distant expedition, although Samnium was little more than 200 kilometres from Rome. This marked the beginning of some hard-fought wars – the three Samnite Wars (343–290 BC), in which Rome suffered several resounding defeats, but was finally victorious.

In this way, by the beginning of the 3rd century BC, Rome was master of the whole peninsula save for the Greek cities in the south. Within ten years they had also fallen to Rome: the last to succumb was Taranto, in 272. Would the installation of a garrison at Rhegium, across the straits from Messina, the key to Sicily, lead to a conflict with Carthage, already settled in the west of the island which it saw as its private preserve? The risk was all the greater in that Rome was seeking to become a sea power, as suggested by its building the port of Ostia in about 355 BC.

Rome's conquests: Rome and the Mediterranean (3rd–1st centuries BC)

The conflict with Carthage, known as the Punic Wars, revealed how Rome's political horizons had broadened. The timidity it had shown in the first centuries of its history now gave way to imperialism, often highly aggressive. It took only two-and-a-half centuries to dominate almost the whole of the Mediterranean world.

During the first Punic War (264–241 BC) the fighting was still confined to Sicily, which Rome's victory made a Roman province. Then, while Carthage was building a new empire in Spain, the Romans extended their rule to Cisalpine Gaul and the edge of the Adriatic. The second Punic War (219–202 BC) was fought in Spain, Italy, North Africa and the Greek world. The brilliant Carthaginian commander Hannibal inflicted some memorable defeats on the Roman legions, as at Lake Trasimene in 217 BC and Cannae in 216 BC. But Rome did not weaken: in 202, having crossed to Africa, Scipio obliged Carthage to surrender after winning the battle of Zama. Sixty years later the third Punic War (149–146 BC) ended in the destruction of Carthage and the creation of the Roman province of Africa.

❸ ROME AND THE CONQUEST OF ITALY
(5th–2nd century BC)

❹ Victory over Carthage

The Roman historian Florus (1st and 2nd centuries AD) saw this as the decisive turning-point in the history of Rome.

. . . For the Roman Empire there was no greater day[1] than that on which the two greatest generals of all time both before and since that war – one the conqueror of Italy, the other of Spain – led their armies to battle against each other. But the leaders themselves met to discuss the peace terms. They remained motionless for a long time, paralysed by the esteem in which each held the other. When no peace agreement was reached, the trumpets sounded. Both confessed that the lines of battle could not have been better organized and that no one could have fought with greater spirit: Scipio said so of Hannibal's army and Hannibal of Scipio's. Yet Hannibal yielded. Africa was the reward of victory and, straightaway afterward, the world.

1. The day of the battle of Zama (202 BC).

Florus, *Epitome of the Wars of the Roman People*, I, 22

1 A NEW MILITARY RESOURCE: THE ELEPHANT

Decorated plate, 3rd century BC

Before its use by Hannibal, the elephant was first employed against Rome by Pyrrhus, fighting on behalf of Taranto.

2 The Triumph of Paulus Aemilius

. . . Next unto them, he came himself in his charret triumphing, which was passing sumptuously set forth and adorned. It was a noble sight to behold: and yet the person of himself only was worth the looking on, without all that great pomp and magnificence. For he was apparelled in a purple gown branched with gold, and carried in his right hand a laurel bough, as all his army did besides: the which being divided by bands and companies, followed the triumphing charret of their captain, some of the soldiers singing songs of victory, which the Romans use to sing in like triumphs, mingling them with merry pleasant toys, rejoicing at their captain.

Plutarch, *Life of Paulus Aemilius*, translated by Sir Thomas North, 1579; J. M. Dent, London, 1898, Vol. III, pp. 125–6

In the eastern Mediterranean there were still the Hellenistic kingdoms, heirs of Alexander's Empire and bitter mutual rivals. Rome had not as yet any settled policy towards them: it was well aware that they were well-organized states with an economy and a civilization that inspired respect – unlike the situation in the West.

Two Roman attacks on Philip V of Macedon forced him to abandon his possessions in Southern Greece. Then the Seleucid Antiochus III, King of Syria, was driven out of the Aegean, Asia Minor and the Hellespont.

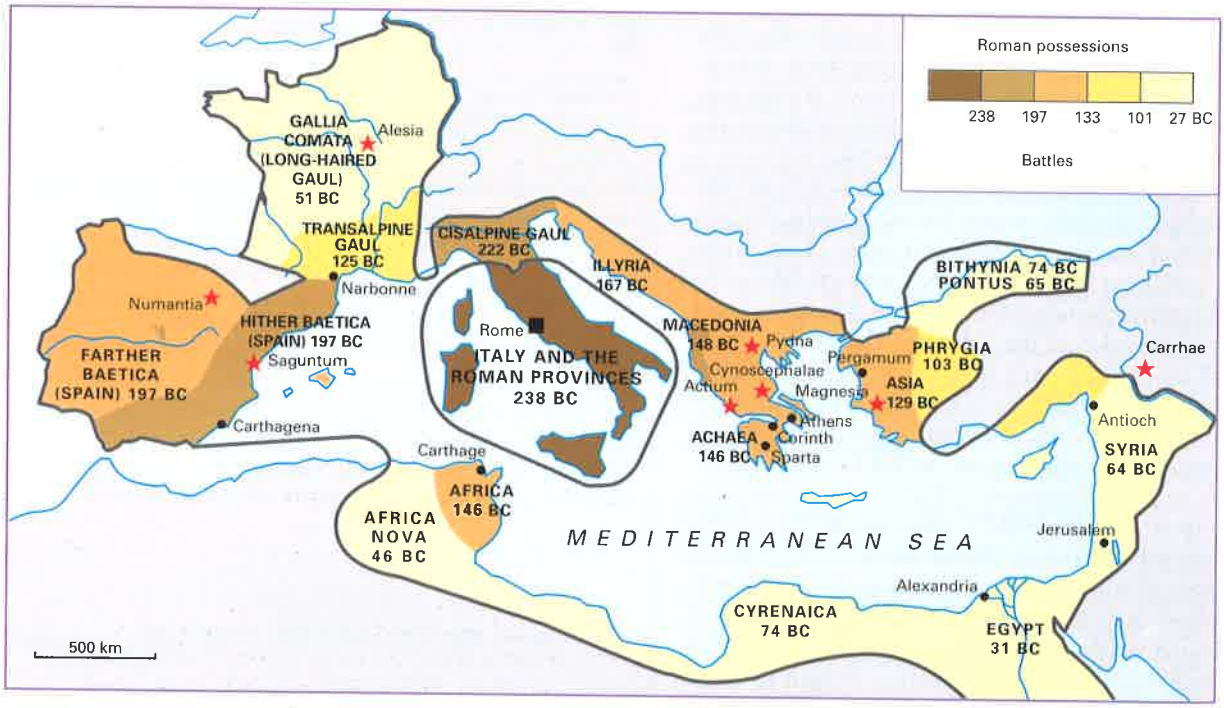
By establishing new provinces – e.g. the province of Gallia Narbonensis in southern Gaul or the province of Asia, the former Kingdom of Pergamum bequeathed by its king to the Roman people – Rome had come to dominate almost the entire Mediterranean world by the end of the 2nd century BC. In the 1st century BC Caesar added 'Long-haired Gaul' (*Gallia Comata*), and Octavius added Egypt. The Roman Empire (including Cleopatra's Egypt) was European, but also African and Asian: it was now universal; and the Mediterranean had become 'our sea' – '*Mare Nostrum*'.

The ends and means of conquest

Such expansion would not have been possible without the exceptional quality of the Roman legions. They were a citizen's army, whereas the other powers at that time, Carthage or the Hellenistic Kingdoms, had to rely on mercenaries.

But the conquerors faced long and powerful resistance: from the Nervii and then the Eburones under Ambiorix in Gallia Belgica; from Vercing-

3 THE CONQUEST OF THE MEDITERRANEAN



etorix, who for a time managed to raise almost all of Gaul against Caesar; and from Boudicca, the Queen of the Iceni, in what is now Norfolk, England. In AD 9, Arminius, a Cheruscan prince, defeated the Roman general Varus in the Teutoburg forest and thereby limited Rome's grip on the borders of Germany. Earlier, north-east of Old Castile, there had been the dramatic siege of Numantia in 133 BC, in which the Numantians had preferred to burn their city and commit mass suicide than surrender. This heroic gesture, which acquired symbolic status, eclipsed for ever the victory of Scipio Aemilianus.

The spoils of conquest were of benefit only to the Romans – in the narrow sense of the inhabitants of the city – whether it was the booty collected by the soldiers, the tribute exacted by Roman governors like the famous Verres in Sicily or the gifts given to the people of Rome, who from 167 BC onwards no longer paid direct taxes.

In the conquered regions the Senate followed the policy of divide and rule: hence the great diversity of jurisdictions. Some cities became subject to Rome, directly by the fact of surrender; at the other extreme were the colonies, made up of Roman citizens who had left the capital to found new Romes, overseeing the surrounding areas and beginning to Romanize them. Between these two extremes there was a variety of allied towns and *municipia* which kept their original institutions, but some or all of whose citizens enjoyed the same rights (civil in the case of colonies or *municipia* under Latin law, political if under Roman law) as the inhabitants of Rome.

In Italy these distinctions tended to disappear at the beginning of the 1st century BC, as a result of the paradoxical 'Social War', in which the allies made war on Rome in the hope of becoming Roman citizens, were defeated by the Roman armies, but then were granted their wishes by the Senate. Only from that time onwards was it legitimate to speak of a Roman Italy.

Outside Italy, however, the provinces were shamelessly exploited; and, if the Empire had not changed its policy, the Europe of the 20th century would no doubt lack any sense that its civilization owed much to Rome.

The death-throes of the Republic (2nd and 1st centuries BC)

The rapid growth of the empire led to more than a century of crises, out of which arose the Imperial regime in Rome. The institutions of the old Republic proved ill-adapted to virtual world domination: the economy, society and people's mentality all changed.

4 LEGIONARIES OF THE REPUBLICAN PERIOD
Louvre Museum, Paris
Wearing a helmet and breastplate, the legionary carried an oval, convex wooden shield. Here, his short sword cannot be seen, nor his sharp iron javelin with its wooden shaft.

5 ROME AS A NAVAL POWER
A cast made from Trajan's Column: embarking at Brindisi in AD 105. Bucharest, Historical Museum of the Romanian Socialist Republic; Rome, Vatican Museum
The struggle against Carthage obliged the Romans to build a fleet and they went on developing it to safeguard their lines of communication in the Mediterranean and the Channel. Naval technology barely changed from the Republic to the Empire.

❶ The exploitation of the provinces

Cicero, a lawyer and statesman in the Republican tradition, made famous the misdeeds of Verres in Sicily

. . . There is not a single property, inherited from a father or grandfather, that he has not adjudged confiscated by reason of his sovereign power. Incalculable sums of money have been levied from the possessions of arable farmers by means of criminal additions to the laws; the most faithful allies have been counted as enemies and treated as such; Roman citizens have been tortured and put to death as if they were slaves . . . .

Cicero, *First prosecution of Verres*, V

❷ THE MONARCHICAL TEMPTATION

The decline of the Republican institutions as Rome's possessions expanded led victorious generals to try their luck with experiments bordering on monarchy, in the teeth of the traditionalism of the senatorial aristocracy.

SULLA
(138–78 BC)
Louvre Museum, Paris
Having defeated Mithridates in Asia, Sulla seized Rome by force in 83 BC and ruled it as a dictatorship for several years before 'abdicating' in 79 BC.

JULIUS CAESAR
(?100–44 BC)
Barraco Museum, Rome
After conquering the Gauls, Caesar took Rome by force, but his monarchical style of government led to his assassination by the senatorial party.

Rural smallholdings declined and the great estates (*latifundia*) grew. Being called up for war every year the peasants could not look after their fields or restore them if, as too often happened, they had to be abandoned. Even when they were successful, they were undercut by low-price wheat imported from the provinces. So they left the land and swelled the urban proletariat, where they became the clients of their former military leaders and had to serve their political interests. Plebeian status now was no longer a matter of birth but of poverty.

The *nobilitas*, on the other hand, i.e. senators who had made their fortunes in politics, seized the *ager publicus* – the land taken from defeated enemies. The estates that they thus accumulated were devoted to stockbreeding and run by slaves.

At the same time there developed a class of merchants and financiers whose wealth was not locked up in land. They profited from the development of trade and taxation. These 'knights' had political ambitions and relied for support at some times on the senatorial aristocracy and at others on the *plebs*.

There was also a psychological change. True, the people remained superstitiously attached to old beliefs and past rituals. But the best educated in society were attracted by Greece and later by the East. Roman religion became imbued with mythology that had sprung from the imaginative spirit of the Greeks, but alien to Rome. Thus the austere Jupiter of the Romans and Etruscans came to be credited with the same adventures among mortals as his Greek predecessor Zeus – with whom he was soon amalgamated.

Stoic philosophy, also from Greece, acquired a number of followers. Its praise of moderation and self-control corresponded to the moral ideal of *gravitas* upheld by Roman tradition. The education of a young man of good family now had to include a long stay in Greece. This produced the Greco-Roman civilization of which Europe is the heir: it combined the down-to-earth practicality of Romulus's descendants with the intellectual and artistic sophistication of those of Pericles.

The politicians of this period were most often attached to their immediate personal interests or those of their class: they were sometimes unaware that these changes in material reality called for similar reform of the institutions. Even when they could imagine reforms, they rejected them. This was the time of Rome's 'civil wars'.

Tiberius, and then Caius Gracchus, tried to restore peasant smallholdings at the expense of the senatorial aristocracy. But they were only feebly supported by the potential beneficiaries and were later assassinated – at a ten years' interval – by the henchmen of the *nobilitas*. They

thereby won the reputation of revolutionaries – whereas the spirit of their policy was rather that of restoring the past. The time of reformers gave way to that of the conquerors.

Marius, a knight, enrolled in his army a number of plebeians, who had hitherto been excluded. They became devoted to him body and soul, and backed his ambition to become head of state. But he was a better general than a politician and he failed to carry through his reform. The same fate dogged Sulla, who seized power by force of arms, liquidated his enemies by a series of lethal proscriptions and exercised a sort of permanent dictatorship, in fact a disguised monarchy. In 79 BC he abdicated, for reasons that remain obscure.

Both Pompey and Caesar also owed their political success to their armies, which were more loyal to their leaders than to the Republic and its discredited institutions. Their military campaigns, by Pompey in the East and Caesar in Gaul, were dictated less by the interests of Rome than by their need to win glory and gold to promote and finance their careers. Factional struggles led to the assassination of first one and then the other, without, however, securing the impossible – the restoration of the former Republic.

It was Octavius, the nephew and adopted son of Julius Caesar, who succeeded where his predecessors had failed. Abandoning the violence that he and Mark Antony had used on those responsible for Caesar's assassination, Octavius incarnated Roman virtues, by contrast with his former ally, who in the arms of Cleopatra had succumbed to the seductions of the Orient.

Octavius's institutional reforms were discreet and gradual, so much so that historians cannot clearly date the moment when the Republic came to an end. Theoretically, the Senate retained all its prerogatives and Octavius was only its *Princeps*, the first among others who were equal to him, or *primus inter pares*. It was on this account that his regime has been called a principate. The traditional offices of state remained and year by year he filled one or other of them, jointly with other citizens, thus seeming to respect both annual rotation and collective rule.

But he took among his *praenomina* that of *Imperator* – whence the words emperor and empire – the title by which the victorious general was hailed at the ceremony of his triumph, meaning that victory was a function of his inborn virtues. The Senate proclaimed him Augustus, a religious title which gave him a sacred character and became the *praenomen* of all his successors. So behind its republican façade, the Roman Empire was in fact an adaptation of the Hellenistic type of monarchy.

3 OCTAVIUS

(63 BC–AD 14)
Arles, Musée lapidaire d'art païen

Octavius was 19 when the dictator died. For this reason the Senate thought he was inoffensive, and backed him against Mark Antony, who headed the Caesarian party.

4 The establishment of monarchical power

40 BC Octavius takes the *praenomen* of Imperator[1]
30 BC Octavius receives the power of a tribune[2]
27 BC Octavius receives the *praenomen* of Augustus[3]
19 BC Augustus becomes *Praefectus morum*, supervisor of public behaviour[4]
12 BC Augustus becomes *Pontifex maximus*, chief of the high priests[5]

1. *Title given to a victorious general at his ceremonial triumph; by becoming* Octavius's praenomen, *it both implied an innate link between him and victory, and gave him* imperium *– absolute military power – over the provinces.*
2. *As a patrician, Octavius could not be a tribune. But he was given the corresponding privileges of inviolability and the right of veto.*
3. *This title implied a religious 'authority', a novelty in Roman institutions.*
4. *Like the Censor, the* Praefectus morum *appointed new Senators.*
5. *This title made Augustus the head of the national religion.*

5 The restoration of a republican façade

. . . In my sixth and seventh consulates (28–27 BC), after I had put an end to the civil wars, being invested with absolute power by universal consent, I divested myself of the powers I exerted and put them in the hands of the Senate and People of Rome. In return, I was given by decree of the Senate the praenomen *of Augustus.*[1] *. . . From that moment, I enjoyed authority over all* [auctoritas]*; but I never had greater legal power* [potestas] *than any of the other officials who were my colleagues . . . .*

1. The name Augustus (from the verb *augere*, to increase), hitherto reserved for places and objects consecrated to the gods, gave him religious authority (*auctoritas*).

Res Gestae Divi Augusti, 34, 1