

6

ROME AND THE BARBARIANS

750 B.C.E. – 480 C.E.

FROM CONQUEST, COLONIZATION AND ALLIANCE TO REVOLT, BANKRUPTCY AND DISMEMBERMENT

COMMENTARY

As its title suggests, this chapter explores the complex nature of the relationships between the Roman Empire, its **citizens** and subjects, and its “**barbarian**” neighbors. Among the topics and sub-themes addressed are: the course of -- and possible reasons for -- Roman expansion; the interaction between imperial growth and domestic politics in Rome; the effects, costs and benefits of Empire on Rome and its subject peoples; and the reasons for the “Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.” If there is a central theme or thesis, it is summed up in the quotations from the Roman authors **Virgil** and **Tacitus** (p. 158) and repeated later in the chapter: Rome’s imperial experience was one of both proverbial grandeur and enduring cultural legacies as well as pervasive class conflict and military oppression.

Spodek accepts the arguments of many classical scholars in perceiving the origins of Roman imperialism rooted in the early history of the **Roman Republic**. As the Romans struggled to free themselves from the rule of **Etruscan** kings and protect their lands from the attacks of **Celtic** invaders from northern Italy, the text explains, they “adopted a reverse ‘domino theory.’ Each state that remained outside her power appeared to pose a threat to Rome, and might line up those already conquered to turn against her. Rome allowed no such threats anywhere in Italy” (1st ed., 153). She made alliances with other Italian city-states and made war on those who refused, until all Italy south of the Po River was under her domination. As Rome’s borders expanded, her potentially-hostile neighbors seemed to multiply, and this policy of “creeping-defense” was extended throughout the Mediterranean and across the Alps. Between approximately 260 and 120 B.C.E., Rome’s armies and a newly-developed navy conquered **Carthage**, Macedonia, Greece, southern **Gaul** (France), the Iberian Peninsula and western Anatolia: the Mediterranean Sea had become **Mare Nostrum** (“Our Sea”) to the Romans. Always claiming to be on the defensive, Rome had subjugated an empire.

For the Romans, their empire brought wealth and power, but in so doing also increased class tensions, encouraged further expansion and ultimately led to civil war and the end of the Republic. The benefits and costs of empire were not evenly distributed in Rome or throughout Italy. Members of the old ruling class, the **patricians**, and newer elite of administrators, military commanders and merchants prospered, while the status of the **plebeians** (ordinary citizens) and Italian allies who comprised the Roman armies often deteriorated. Attempts at reform were violently suppressed by the Roman **Senate**, leading to riots in Rome and a brief revolt among Italian cities.. At the same time, the ambitions of those in the ruling elite were spurred by the opportunities for military glory, political power and personal enrichment which were offered by imperial expansion. These two tendencies fused in the First Century B.C.E., as a succession of ambitious generals vied with each other for political power by adding new conquests at the expense of Rome’s neighbors in North Africa, the eastern Mediterranean and Gaul; conquests won by what came to be personal armies, recruited with promises of Roman citizenship, booty and farmland in **colonies** to be established in the conquered territories. Order was finally restored with the victory of **Octavian**, the nephew of **Julius Caesar**, who took the name **Augustus Caesar** established new government, with himself as *princeps* (or “first citizen”) and *imperator* (“military commander” or “Emperor”) which he claimed preserved the institutions of the republic. In fact, it proved to be little more than a military dictatorship in disguise, and the unequal distribution of wealth, social tensions and deadly political rivalries that had brought down the republic were to plague the “Empire” throughout its existence.

Rome was enriched by her empire, not only by the steady influx of slaves, tax revenues, grain and luxury goods it brought, but also by the cultural contributions of its conquests, above all Greece and the Hellenistic Ecumene. Roman art, literature and science were based on Greek models and both secular philosophies, such as **Stoicism** and new religions, including **Christianity**, were products of the Roman-Hellenistic synthesis. The benefits of empire to Rome’s subject peoples were no less important, but just as unevenly distributed as they were in Italy. Everywhere the Romans went, they

built cities, roads, and **aqueducts**. They gradually extended the rights of Roman citizenship and the protection of **Roman Law** to all free males within the empire. Latin became the language of law, government and administration, while the elite learned Greek as well. Provincials became Roman officials and generals and several even became emperors. Religious diversity was tolerated, as long as it did not challenge Roman authority. The Roman Empire itself became a cultural and economic *ecumene*.

This *Pax Romana* remained attractive and viable as long as prosperity and stability were preserved and a sense of shared cultural community was maintained. These favorable conditions began to disappear in the Third and Fourth Centuries, C.E., as the costs of maintaining the empire began to outstrip its resources and political power came to depend more than ever on military command. Although its borders had been officially stabilized, the empire absorbed more and more **barbarians** into its provinces, first as military recruits, then as migrants and refugees pushed along by other nomadic groups from the north and east. Eventually, as the text puts it, the Roman Empire did not so much “fall” as it ceased, first of all to be a unified “empire” – as it was split into eastern and western halves – and then eventually, ceased to be “Roman,” becoming more Greek in the surviving **Byzantine Empire** of the East and more **Germanic** in the successor kingdoms of the “Barbarian” West.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

- A. The Extent of the Roman Empire
 - 1. Rome and the Mediterranean – *Mare Nostrum*
 - 2. The *Pax Romana*
- B. Founding the Republic
 - 1. Rome and the Etruscans
 - 2. Institutions of the early republic
- C. Expansion to Empire
 - 1. The conquest of Italy
 - 2. The conquest of Carthage and the western Mediterranean: the Punic Wars
 - 3. Expansion into Spain and France
 - 4. The conquest of the Greeks: the eastern Mediterranean
 - 5. FOCUS: “New Wisdom” – Rome’s policy of brute force
 - 6. The conquest of northwestern Europe
 - 7. Completing the conquests: the Empire at its zenith
- D. Imperial Rome: How Do We Know?
 - 1. PROFILE: Augustus Caesar, Emperor
 - 2. Multiple perspectives:
 - a. Historians of ancient Rome: Polybius, Livy, Tacitus
 - b. Accounts of statesmen and politicians: Cicero, Julius Caesar
 - c. Archaeological sources
 - d. SPOTLIGHT: Pompeii, a Roman town
- E. The Institutions of Empire: From Republican Rome to Imperial Rome
 - 1. Military power
 - 2. Class and class conflict
 - a. The “struggle of the orders” -- patricians and plebeians
 - b. Patriarchs, patrons and clients
 - i. *Paterfamilias* and the law of *patria potestas*
 - ii. FOCUS: gender relationships
 - c. Urban splendor and squalor
 - d. Attempts at reform: the Gracchi brothers
 - e. SOURCE: Rome’s code of laws – two contrasting perspectives
 - f. “Bread and circuses”
- F. Extending Citizenship and International Law

1. Extension of Roman citizenship
 2. FOCUS: revolt and suppression
 3. The *Jus gentium*
- G. Economic Policies for the Empire
1. Rome and the provinces
 2. Feeding the empire
 3. Empire and trade: towns, roads, sea routes and the *Pax Romana*
- H. Cultural Policies for the Empire
1. Greece and Rome: cultural borrowing
 2. Religion in the Empire: flexibility and conflict
 3. Stoicism
- I. Christianity Triumphant
1. Early persecutions
 2. Attractions of Christianity
 3. The conversion of Constantine and the Edict of Milan
- J. The Barbarians and the Fall of the Roman Empire
1. Who were the “Barbarians”? -- the Celts, Goths (Germanic peoples) and Huns
 2. Barbarians: How do we know?
 3. The decline and dismemberment of the Roman Empire
 4. Causes of the decline and fall
 5. Persistence of empire in the east: the Byzantine Empire
- K. The Roman Empire: What Difference Does It Make?
1. Cultural legacies
 2. Institutional legacies
 3. The “idea” of Rome

IDENTIFICATION TERMS

For each term, students should be able to provide an identification or definition, an approximate date, a geographical location (if relevant) and – most important – a concise explanation of its significance in the context of the chapter. Terms that appear in the *Study Guide* are listed in **bold** font in the first column.

Edward Gibbon	Etruscans	Roman citizenship
Punic Wars	Gaul	Roman colonies
Julius Caesar	Carthage	<i>Pax Romana</i>
Stoicism	Hannibal	Virgil
Justinian	Augustus Caesar	Constantine
Romance languages	Tacitus	Celts
<i>Paterfamilias</i>	Pompeii	Goths/Germans
“bread and circuses”	“Struggle of the Orders”	Huns
Cicero	Gracchus brothers	Byzantine Empire
<i>jus gentium</i>	Spartacus	Constantinople

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After students have read and studied Chapter 6, they should be able to:

1. Be able to fit the circumstances of the development, government and decline of the Roman Empire into the general models described by Spodek in Chapter 5.
2. Understand the development of Roman society and the Roman form of government – and their connection.

3. Understand the circumstances, motivations and dynamics for Roman imperial expansion, as they related to both domestic pressures and external threats.
4. Be able to explain the reasons for the collapse of the Roman Republic and the establishment of the Augustan Principate and Empire.
5. Appreciate the legacy of Greece and the Hellenistic Ecumene on Roman culture, art, philosophy and religion.
6. Discuss the development of Christianity and its possible connection with the decline and fall of Rome.
7. Understand Rome's cultural legacy on Europe and western civilization.

SUGGESTIONS FOR LECTURE TOPICS

1. Discuss Rome's cultural inheritance (from Greece, Persia and the Hellenistic Ecumene) and its cultural legacy to Europe and the western world.
2. Explain the background, motivations and dynamics of Roman imperial expansion during the Republic and Empire.
3. Discuss the circumstances of Rome's political development and constitution and connect them and the military, social and economic pressures caused by imperial expansion to the downfall of the Roman Republic.
4. Discuss Rome's relationship with her "barbarian" neighbors and their impact on the Roman Empire.
5. Explain why the Eastern Roman Empire was able to survive for almost 1000 years after the fall of the Empire in the West.

TOPICS FOR ESSAYS OR CLASS DISCUSSIONS

1. The text argues that "the earliest enduring social structure in Rome was the patron-client relationship" (173) and implies that, in different forms, it was perhaps the most important relationship in Roman society. What exactly was the nature of the "patron-client relationship"? What different forms did it assume in Roman society and politics and how did it affect the course of Roman history so profoundly?
2. Group work: Compare this chapter's account of the "Decline and Fall" of the Roman Empire with the general classification of causes of imperial decline enumerated in Chapter 5 (p. 123). Which of these general causes seem to have applied to Rome's decline? Which one was most important? Cite specific examples from Chapter 6 to support your argument.
3. Discuss the development and status of Christianity in the Roman Empire. How was it spread so quickly throughout the Empire? Why were Christians persecuted, in contrast to the Romans' usual policy of religious toleration? How did it eventually become the dominant religion? What role might it have played in the decline of the empire?
4. Debate: The Roman poet Virgil and historian Tacitus offer opposing views of Roman imperial rule (pp. 158; 168-159; and 182). Based on their arguments and on other evidence in the chapter (especially from primary sources, including photographs) which Roman presents the more accurate case? On the whole, did Rome practice imperial rule more by hegemony or domination? Did Rome's subject peoples benefit or suffer more, on the whole?
5. What and who were the "Barbarians"? How "barbarian" were they? What do we know about them and from what sources? Exactly how did they contribute to the decline of the Roman Empire, according to the chapter?
6. Just as Roman writers such as Tacitus and Virgil disagreed on the justice of Rome's imperial policies, so have modern historians disagree on the justice of Roman law and domestic gender policies, as well as the character and accomplishments of Augustus Caesar, the first Roman Emperor. Discuss one of these issues in a concise essay that draws evidence and arguments from the historical opinions reproduced in the PROFILE, FOCUS and SOURCE sections in the text.
7. Group work: Use the maps in Chapters 5 and 6 to address the following questions:
 - a. In what respects could the Roman Empire have served as a successor to and extension of the Hellenistic Ecumene? What were the effects on Rome's historical and cultural legacy?
 - b. Discuss Spodek's argument that the Roman Empire did not "fall" as much as it simply ceased to be "Roman." Cite specific examples of this, using the maps as evidence.

8. Current events & issues: A major historical debate exists at present about the term “Western Civilization.” Is there such a thing? If so, what makes this civilization unique and what were the contributions of the Greeks and Romans to this uniqueness?

TEXT RESOURCES (Spodek, 2nd ed.)

Timetables, charts and graphs:	The Roman Empire	(p. 159-160)
	Roman Emperors	(p. 169)
	Greek and Roman Gods	(p. 183)
Large photographs and illustrations:	Capitoline Wolf	(p. 162)
	Column of Trajan	(p. 166)
	Roman Aqueduct at Segovia, Spain	(p. 167)
	Arch of Trajan, Benevento	(p. 168)
	The Colloseum, Rome	(p. 181)
	Maiden Castle, England (Celtic hill-fort)	(p. 186)
	Hagia Sophia, Constantinople (Turkey)	(p. 192)
Maps:	The Roman Empire	(p. 161)
	Eurasian trade	(p. 179)
	The coming of the Barbarians	(p. 187)
	Rome’s successors	(p. 189)
	The Byzantine Empire	(p. 191)
SPOTLIGHT:	Pompeii, a Roman Town	(p. 170-171)
PROFILE:	Augustus Caesar	(p. 164-165)
FOCUS:	“New Wisdom” – Rome’s Policy of Brute Force	(p. 163)
	Gender Relationships	(p. 174)
	Revolt and Suppression	(p. 177)
SOURCES:	Rome’s Code of Laws: Two Contrasting Perspectives	(p. 176)

ADDITIONAL PRIMARY SOURCES (*Documents Set & www.prenhall.com/Spodek*)

6-1	A hero under fire: Livy relates the trials and tribulations of Scipio Africanus
6-2	“The War with Catiline” – Sallust’s insights into the Roman Republic’s decline
6-3	Suetonius” a critical writer has, for once, very few negative comments about an emperor [from <i>The Twelve Caesars</i>]
6-4	Pliny the Younger on the Vesuvius eruption and the Christian “controversy” [from <i>The Letters of the Younger Pliny</i>]
6-5	A Roman expresses grudging admiration for some of his country’s barbarian adversaries [from Tacitus, <i>Germania</i>]
6-6	Petronius: insights into Roman private life and upper-middle class values [from the <i>Satyrica</i>]
6-7	Julian Emperor: the ultimate pagan
6-8	Sidonius Appolinaris: Rome’s decay, and a glimpse of the new order
www	<i>Anekdotia</i> : Icons dragged through the mud [from Procopius, <i>Secret History</i>]

AUDIO-VISUAL RESOURCES (videos, DVD's, CD-ROM, and web-sites)

***Ancient Rome: History Channel.* [4 videos; 200 minutes, color]**

A narrative history of the development of Rome and the rise of the Roman Empire. Includes interviews with classical scholars, film footage of important cultural sites and readings from contemporary literary, philosophical and cultural sources.

***The Celts: BBC.* [3 videos; 330 minutes, color]**

Explores Celtic civilization from its beginnings, through the Roman period, into modern times.

***Cleopatra's World – Alexandria Revealed: History Channel.* [video; 100 minutes, color]**

Surveys Cleopatra's Hellenistic capital city and its cultural significance and examines the life and reign of the Ptolemaic queen of Egypt who played and lost at imperial politics with Julius Caesar, Marc Antony and Octavian (Augustus).

***Greek and Roman Civilization Home Page: <http://hermes.ucd.ie/~civilise/classics.html>* [web-site]**

Provides links to museums and other resources for Greek and Roman art, archaeology, literature and culture.

***Pompeii, a Journey Back in Time.* [video; 60 minutes, color]**

Video exploration of the treasures of Pompeii, preserved after Vesuvius' eruption in 79 A.D.

***The Roman Empire: <http://wwwtc.nhmccd.cctx.us:443/people/crf01/rome/>* [web-site]**

Contains a chronology of Roman history, chronological lists of emperors and officials of the Roman Empire, and genealogies of Roman emperors.

***Romarch: <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~pfoss/index.html>* [web-site]**

This site includes links to museums, scholarly articles, document and image collections; teaching resources; and an interactive map of the Roman Empire, by which students can choose material by location.

***Rome: Power & Glory: TLC.* [6 videos; 300 minutes, color]**

Traces Roman history from the founding of the first villages along the Tiber to the "Decline and Fall" of the Roman Empire. Heavy emphasis on Rome's cultural legacy.

***Rome Resources: <http://www.nltl.columbia.edu/groups/Rome/index/html>* [web-site]**

One of the most useful sites for instructors and students, this Columbia University site – the Rome Project – contains articles on Roman history, literature, society, archaeology, philosophy and religion, and warfare; as well as maps and tables.

***Warfare and Tactics of the Roman Republic: <http://www.ganet.net/~atuly/roman/index/html>* [web-site]**

This site includes maps and descriptions of major battles of the Punic, Greek and other wars of the Roman Republic; analyses of Roman strategy and tactics; and descriptions of Roman military recruiting and organization.