The chief turning point in the long course of Roman history came in 31 BCE, with the final collapse of the Roman Republic, and its replacement by an Imperial system of government. Augustus, the first emperor, was faced with the task of restoring peace. During his long reign, the spread of economic prosperity produced a hard-working middle class, loyal to the central government. At the same time his social reforms, aimed chiefly at the upper classes, were intended to return his subjects to traditional family values. Laws provided tax breaks for large families and penalized couples who did not produce children and those who remained unmarried. Adultery became a crime against the state.

Yet despite the success of Augustus’s political and economic policies, it is doubtful if his moral reforming zeal met with more than polite attention. His own daughter and granddaughter, both named Julia, were notorious for their scandalous affairs. To make matters worse, one of the lovers of his daughter Julia was a son of the Emperor’s old enemy, Mark Antony, whose defeat and suicide in 31 BCE had brought the Republic crashing down. Whatever his personal feelings, duty compelled Augustus to banish Julia to a remote Mediterranean island. A few years later he had to find another distant location for the banishment of his granddaughter. He hushed up the details of both scandals, but there was much gossip.

Augustus himself created a personal image of ancient Roman frugality and morality, although on his death-bed he gave a clue as to his own more complex view of his life. He asked a slave to bring a mirror, so that he could comb his hair. Then, turning to the friends beside him, he asked, “Tell me, have I played well my part in this comedy of life? If so, applaud me and send me on my way.”

THE IMPORTANCE OF ROME

If the origins of our intellectual heritage go back to the Greeks and, less directly, to the peoples of Egypt and the Near East, the contribution of Rome to the wider spreading of Western civilization was tremendous. In fields such as language, law, politics, religion, and art Roman culture continues to affect our lives. The road
network of modern Europe is based on one planned and built by the Romans some two thousand years ago; the alphabet we use is the Roman alphabet; and the division of the year into twelve months of unequal length is a modified form of the calendar introduced by Julius Caesar in 45 BCE. Even after the fall of the Roman Empire the city of Rome stood for centuries as the symbol of civilization; later empires deliberately shaped themselves on the Roman model.

The enormous impact of Rome on our culture is partly the result of the industrious and determined character of the Romans, who early in their history saw themselves as the divinely appointed rulers of the world. In the course of fulfilling their mission, they spread Roman culture from the north of England to Africa, from Spain to India (see map, “The Roman World”). This Romanization of the entire known world permitted the Romans to disseminate ideas drawn from other peoples. Greek art and literature were handed down and incorporated into the Western tradition through the Romans, not from the Greeks. The rapid spread of Christianity in the fourth century CE was a result of the decision by the Roman emperors to adopt it as the official religion of the Roman Empire. In these and in other respects, the

<table>
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<td>Development of Etruscan culture</td>
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<td>Destruction of Carthage: Africa becomes Roman province; sack of Corinth: Greece becomes Roman province</td>
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<td>31 BCE</td>
<td>Battle of Actium won by Octavian</td>
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<td>30 BCE</td>
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<td>c. 14–68 CE</td>
<td>Julio-Claudian emperors: Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero</td>
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<td>96–138 CE</td>
<td>Adoptive emperors: Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian . . .</td>
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<td>284–305 CE</td>
<td>Reign of Diocletian; return of civil order</td>
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<tr>
<td>301 CE</td>
<td>Edict of Diocletian, fixing wages and prices</td>
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<tr>
<td>330 CE</td>
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<tr>
<td>381 CE</td>
<td>Paganism officially suppressed; Christianity made state religion</td>
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<td>476 CE</td>
<td>Romulus Augustus forced to abdicate as last Western Roman emperor</td>
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<tr>
<td>1st cent.</td>
<td>Realistic portraiture; Funerary Portrait</td>
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<td>c. 30 BCE–30 CE</td>
<td>Villa of Mysteries frescoes, Pompeii</td>
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<td>c. 20</td>
<td>View of a Garden, fresco from Augustus's villa, Prima Porta</td>
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<td>13–9</td>
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<td>Decline of realism</td>
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The legacy that Rome was to pass on to Western civilization had been inherited from its predecessors. The Romans were in fact surprisingly modest about their own cultural achievements, believing that their strengths lay in good government and military prowess rather than in artistic and intellectual attainments. It was their view that Rome should get on with the job of ruling the world and leave luxuries like sculpture and astronomy to others.

**Roman Music** It is easy but unfair to accept the Romans’ estimate of themselves as uncreative without questioning it. True, in some fields the Roman contribution was not impressive. What little we know about Roman music, for example, suggests that its loss is hardly a serious one. It was intended mainly for performance at religious events like weddings and funerals and as a background for social occasions. Musicians were often brought into aristocratic homes to provide after-dinner entertainment at a party, and individual performers, frequently women, would play before small groups in a domestic setting. Small bands of traveling musicians, playing on pipes and such percussion instruments as cymbals and tambourines, provided background music.

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<td>Extension of Greek trumpet into Roman tuba, used in games, processions, battles</td>
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<td><strong>1st cent.</strong> Discovery of concrete <strong>c. 82</strong> Sulla commissions Sanctuary of Fortuna Primagenia, Praeneste</td>
<td><strong>c. 65–43</strong> Lucretius, <em>On the Nature of Things</em>, Epicurean poem; Cicero, orations and philosophical essays; Catullus, lyric poems; Caesar, <em>Commentaries</em>, on Gallic wars</td>
<td><strong>c. 2nd cent. BCE</strong> Greek music becomes popular at Rome</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>300–305</strong> Diocletian’s palace, Split</td>
<td><strong>306–315</strong> Basilica of Constantine, Rome</td>
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for the acrobats and jugglers who performed in public squares and during gladiatorial contests [Fig. 4.2]. Nonetheless, for the Romans music certainly had none of the intellectual and philosophical significance it bore for the Greeks, and when Roman writers mention musical performances, it is often to complain about the noise. The only serious development in Roman music was the extension of the Greek trumpet into a longer and louder bronze instrument known as the **tuba**, which was used on public occasions like games and processions and in battle, when an especially powerful type some four feet (1.2 m) long gave the signals for attack and retreat. The sound was not pleasant.

In general, Roman music lovers contented themselves with Greek music played on Greek instruments. Although serious music began to grow in popularity with the spread of Greek culture, it always remained an aristocratic rather than a popular taste. Emperor Nero’s love of music, coupled with his insistence on giving public concerts on the lyre, may have even hastened his downfall.

In areas other than music, the Roman achievement is considerable. There is no doubt that Roman art and literature rarely show the originality of their Greek predecessors, but originality is neither the only artistic
virtue nor is its absence always a defect. The Roman genius, in fact, lay precisely in absorbing and assimilating influences from outside and going on to create from them something typically Roman. The lyric poetry of first-century BCE writers like Catullus was inspired by the works of Sappho, Alcaeus, and other Greek poets of the sixth century BCE, but nothing could be more Roman in spirit than Catullus’s poems. In architecture, the Romans achieved a style that is one of the most impressive of all our legacies from the ancient world.

It is useful to emphasize the real value of Roman art and literature because there has been a tendency since the nineteenth century to exalt the Greek cultural achievement at the expense of the Roman. All agree on the superior quality of Roman roads, sewers, and aqueducts; Roman sculpture or drama has in general been less highly rated, mainly because of comparisons to that of the Greeks. Any study of Roman culture inevitably involves examining the influences that went to make it up, and it is always necessary to remember the Roman ability to absorb and combine outside ideas and create something fresh from them.

Rome’s history was a long one, beginning with the foundation of the city in the eighth century BCE. For the first two and a half centuries of its existence it was ruled by kings. The rest of the vast span of Roman history is divided into two long periods: Republican Rome (509–31 BCE), during which time democratic government was first developed and then allowed to collapse, and Imperial Rome (31 BCE–476 CE), during which the Roman world was ruled, at least in theory, by one man—the emperor. The date 476 CE marks the deposition of the last Roman emperor in the West; it forms a convenient, if artificial, terminus to the Imperial period.

Shortly after the foundation of the Republic, the Romans began their conquest of neighboring peoples: first in Italy, then throughout Europe, Asia, and North Africa. As their territory grew, Roman civilization developed along with it, assimilating the cultures of the peoples who fell under Roman domination. But long before the Romans conquered Greece or anywhere else, they were conquered by the Etruscans, and the story of Rome’s rise to power truly begins with the impact on Roman life made by Etruscan rule there.

THE ETRUSCANS AND THEIR ART

The late eighth century BCE was a time of great activity in Italy. The Greeks had reached the south coast and Sicily. In the valley of the Tiber, farmers and herdsmen of a group of tribes known as the Latins (origin of the name of the language spoken by the Romans) were establishing small village settlements, one of which was to become the future imperial city of Rome. The most flourishing area at the time, however, was to the north of Rome, where in central Italy a new culture—the Etruscan—was appearing.

The Etruscans are among the most intriguing of ancient peoples, and ever since early Roman times scholars have argued about who they were, where they came from, and what language they spoke. Even today, despite the discoveries of modern archaeologists, we still know little about the origins of the Etruscans, and their language has yet to be deciphered. By 700 BCE they had established themselves in the part of Italy named for them, Tuscany, but it is not clear whether they arrived from abroad or whether their culture was a more developed form of an earlier Italian one. The ancient Greeks and Romans believed that the Etruscans had come to Italy from the East, perhaps from Lydia, an ancient kingdom in Asia Minor. Many aspects of their life and much of their art have pronounced Eastern characteristics. In other ways, however, the Etruscans have much in common with their predecessors in central Italy. Even so, no other culture related to the Etruscans’ has ever been found. Whatever their origins, they were to have a major effect on Italian life and on the growth of Rome and its culture [Fig. 4.3].

Etruscan Art From the beginning of their history, the Etruscans showed an outstanding sophistication and technological ability. The sumptuous gold treasures buried in their tombs are evidence both of their material prosperity and of their superb craftsmanship. The commercial contacts of the Etruscans extended

◆ 4.3 Capitoline She-Wolf, c. 500–480 BCE. Although this statue or one very like it became the mascot of Rome, it was probably made by Etruscan craftsmen. The twins Romulus and Remus, legendary founders of the city, were added during the Renaissance.
Bronze, 2’7½” (80 cm) high, 4’4” (1.32 m) long. Musei Capitolini, Rome, Italy © Scala/Art Resource, NY
over most of the western Mediterranean and, in Italy, Etruscan cities like Cerveteri and Tarquinia developed rich artistic traditions. Etruscan art has its own special character, a kind of elemental force almost primitive in spirit, although the craftsmanship and techniques are highly sophisticated. Unlike the Greeks, the Etruscans were less interested in intellectual problems of proportion or understanding how the human body works than in producing an immediate impact on the viewer. The famous statue of Apollo found in 1916 at Veii [Fig. 4.4] is unquestionably related to Greek models, but the tension of the god’s pose and the sinister quality of his smile produce an effect of great power in a typically Etruscan way. One of Apollo’s roles was as god of music, and a lyre—the symbol of music—stands between his legs.

This gifted people was bound to exert a strong influence on the development of civilization in Italy; Etruscan occupation of Rome (616–510 BCE) marks a turning point in Roman history. According to later tradition, the city of Rome had been founded in 753 BCE and was ruled in its earliest days by kings (in actual fact, Rome was probably not much more than a small country town for most of this period). The later Romans’ own grandiose picture of the early days of their city was intended to glamorize its origins, but only with the arrival of the Etruscans did anything like an urban center begin to develop. Etruscan engineers drained a large marshy area, previously uninhabitable, which became the community’s center, the future Roman forum. They built temples and shrines and constructed roads. Among other innovations, the Etruscans introduced several things we are accustomed to think of as typically Roman, including public games like chariot racing and even the toga, the most characteristic form of Roman dress.

Most important, however, was the fact that under Etruscan domination the Romans found themselves for the first time in contact with the larger world. Instead of being simple villagers living in a small community governed by tribal chiefs, they became part of a large cultural unit with links throughout Italy and abroad. Within a hundred years Rome had learned the lessons of Etruscan technology and culture, driven the Etruscans back to their own territory, and begun her unrelenting climb to power.

The rise of Rome signaled the decline of the Etruscans throughout Italy. In the centuries following their expulsion from Rome in 510 BCE, their cities were conquered and their territory taken over by the Romans. In the first century BCE, they automatically received the right of Roman citizenship and became absorbed into the Roman Empire. The gradual collapse of their world is mirrored in later Etruscan art. The wall paintings in the tombs become increasingly gloomy, suggesting that for an Etruscan of the third century BCE, the misfortunes of this life were followed by the tortures of the next. The old couple from Volterra whose anxious faces are so vividly depicted on the lid of their sarcophagus [Fig. 4.6] give us some idea of the troubled spirit of the final days of Etruscan culture.

**REPUBLICAN ROME (509–31 BCE)**

With the expulsion of the Etruscans, the Romans began their climb to power, free now to rule themselves. Instead of choosing a new king, Rome constituted itself a Republic, governed by the people somewhat along the lines of the Greek city-states, although less democratically. Two chief magistrates or consuls were elected
4.5 Etruscan Scene of Fishing and Fowling, c. 520 BCE. Men, fish, and birds are all rendered naturalistically, with acute observation.

From the Tomb of Hunting and Fishing, Tarquinia, Italy. Fresco, detail 5’6” (1.67 m) high. © SEF/Art Resource, NY

4.6 Lid of a Funerary Urn, 1st century BCE. Realistic sculptures occupy the top of the urn containing the couple’s ashes. Note the detailed depiction of the lines and wrinkles on the two faces, which give them character. The Etruscans invented the idea of realistic portraiture, which the Romans then popularized.

Terracotta, 18” (47 cm) long. Museo Etrusco Guarnacci, Volterra, Italy//© Scala/Art Resource, NY
for a one-year term by all the male citizens, but the principal assembly, the Senate, drew most of its members from Roman aristocratic families. From the beginning, therefore, power was concentrated in the hands of the upper class (the patricians), although the lower class (the plebeians) was permitted to form its own assembly. The leaders elected by the plebeian assembly, the tribunes, represented the plebeians' interests and protected them against state officials who treated them unjustly. The meeting place for both the Senate and the assemblies of the people was the forum, the large open space at the foot of the Palatine and Capitoline hills that had been drained and made habitable by the Etruscans [Fig. 4.7].

From the founding of the Roman Republic to its bloody end in the civil wars following the murder of Julius Caesar (44 BCE), its history was dominated by agitation for political equality. Yet the first major confrontation—the conflict between patricians and plebeians—never seriously endangered political stability in Rome or military campaigns abroad. Both sides showed a flexibility and spirit of compromise that produced a gradual growth in plebeian power while avoiding any split disastrous enough to interrupt Rome's growing domination of the Italian peninsula. The final plebeian victory came in 287 BCE with the passage of the Hortensian Law, which made the decisions of the plebeian assembly binding on the entire Senate and Roman people. By then most of Italy had already fallen under Roman control.

Increasing power brought new problems. In the third and second centuries BCE, Rome began to build its empire abroad. The first major target of Roman aggression was the city of Carthage, founded by the Phoenicians around 800 BCE, and by the third century the independent ruler of territories in North Africa, Spain, and Sicily. In the Punic Wars (called after the Roman name for the Phoenicians, Poeni) the Romans decisively defeated the Carthaginians and confiscated their territories. By the first century BCE the entire Hellenistic world had been conquered. From Spain to the Middle East stretched a vast territory consisting of subject provinces, protectorates, and nominally free kingdoms, all of which depended on Roman goodwill and administrative efficiency.

Unfortunately, the Romans had been too busy acquiring their empire to think very hard about how to rule it; the results were frequently chaotic. Provincial administration was incompetent and often corrupt. The long series of wars had hardened the Roman character, leading to insensitivity and, frequently, brutality in the treatment of conquered peoples. This situation was not helped by increasing political instability at home. The old balance of power struck between the patricians and plebeians was being increasingly disturbed by the rise of a middle class, the equites, many of whom were plebeians who had made their fortunes in the wars. Against this background were fought bitter struggles that eventually caused the collapse of the Republic.

**The End of the Roman Republic** By the first century BCE it was apparent that the political system that had been devised for a thriving but small city five hundred years earlier was hopelessly inadequate for a vast empire. Discontent among Rome’s Italian allies led to open revolt. Although the Romans were victorious in the Social War of 90–88 BCE, the cost in lives and economic stability was tremendous. The ineffectuality of
the Senate and the frustration of the Roman people led to a series of struggles among the leading statesmen for supreme power. The popular leader Marius briefly held power but was replaced by his aristocratic rival, Roman general Sulla, who ruled as dictator for a brief and violent period beginning in 82 BCE, only to resign suddenly three years later, in 79 BCE. There followed a protracted series of political skirmishes between Pompey, the self-appointed defender of the Senate, and Julius Caesar, culminating in Caesar’s withdrawal to Gaul and subsequent return to Rome in 49 BCE. After a short but bitter conflict, Caesar defeated Pompey in 48 BCE at the Battle of Pharsalus and returned to Rome as dictator, only to be assassinated in 44 BCE. The civil wars that followed brought the Republic to its unalmented end.

The years of almost uninterrupted violence had a profound effect on the Roman character, and the relief felt when a new era dawned under the first emperor, Augustus, can only be fully appreciated in this light.

**LITERARY DEVELOPMENTS DURING THE REPUBLIC**

The Romans put most of their energy into political and military affairs, leaving little time for art or literature. By the second century BCE, when most of the Mediterranean was under their control and they could afford to relax, they were overwhelmed intellectually and artistically by the Greeks. Conquest of the Hellenistic kingdoms of the East and of Greece brought the Romans into contact with Hellenic culture (see Chapter 3, “The Hellenistic Period”). Thus, from the third century BCE, most Roman works of art followed Greek models in form and content. Roman plays were based on Greek originals, Roman mirrors imitated Greek buildings, and Roman sculpture and painting depicted episodes from Greek mythology.

Greek influence extends to the works of Ennius (239–169 BCE), known to later Romans as the father of Roman poetry. Almost all of his works are lost, but from later accounts Ennius’s tragedies appear to have been adapted from Greek models. His major work was the *Annals*, an epic chronicle of the history of Rome, in which for the first time a Greek metrical scheme was used to write Latin verse.

The two comic playwrights—Plautus (c. 254–184 BCE) and Terence (c. 185–159 BCE)—are the first Roman writers whose works have survived in quantity. Their plays are adaptations of Greek comedies; whereas the Greek originals are comic satires, the Roman versions turn human foibles into pure comedy. Plautus, the more boisterous of the two, is fond of comic songs and farcical intrigues. Terence’s style is more refined, and his characters show greater realism. It says something about the taste of the Roman public that Plautus was by far the more successful. In later times, however, Terence’s sophisticated style was much admired. His plays were studied and imitated both during the Middle Ages and more recently. Both authors were fond of extremely elaborate plots involving mistaken identities, identical twins, and general confusion, with everything sorted out in the last scene.

In general, however, when educated Romans of the late Republic stopped to think about something other than politics, it was likely to be love. Roman lyric poetry, often on a romantic theme, is one of the most rewarding genres of Latin literature. The first great Roman lyric poet, Catullus (c. 80–54 BCE), is one of the best loved of all Roman authors. Instead of philosophical or historical themes, he returned to a traditional subject from Sappho’s time—personal experience—and charted the course of his own love affair with a woman whom he calls Lesbia. Among his works are twenty-five short poems describing the course of that relationship, which range from the ecstasy of its early stages to the disillusionment and despair of the final breakup. The clarity of his style is the perfect counterpart to the direct expression of his emotions. These poems, personal though they are, are not simply an outpouring of feelings. Catullus makes his own experiences universal. However trivial one man’s unhappy love affair may seem in the context of the grim world of the late Republic, Lesbia’s inconstancy has achieved a timelessness unequaled by many more serious events.

Two of the principal figures who dominated those events also made important contributions to Republican literature. Julius Caesar (100–44 BCE) is perhaps the most famous Roman of them all. Brilliant politician, skilled general, expert administrator and organizer, he was also able to write the history of his own military campaigns in his *Commentaries*, in a simple but gripping style. In the four years during which he ruled Rome, he did much to repair the damage of the previous decades. Caesar’s assassination on March 15, 44 BCE, at the hands of a band of devoted republicans, only prolonged Rome’s agony for another thirteen years—as well as provided Shakespeare with the plot for one of his best-known plays: *Julius Caesar*.

Perhaps the most endearing figure of the late Republic was Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BCE), who first made his reputation as a lawyer. He is certainly the figure of this period about whom we know the most, for he took part in several important legal cases and embarked on a political career. In 63 BCE he served as consul. A few years later, the severity with which he had put down a plot against the government during his consulship earned him a short period in exile as the result of the scheming of a rival political faction. Cicero returned in triumph, however, and in the struggle between Pompey and Caesar supported Pompey. Although Caesar seems to have forgiven him, Cicero never really trusted Caesar, despite his admiration for the dictator’s abilities. His mixed feelings are well expressed in a letter to his friend...
Atticus after he had invited Caesar, by then the ruler of the Roman world, to dinner:

Quite a guest, although I have no regrets and everything went very well indeed. . . . He was taking medicine for his digestion, so he ate and drank without worrying and seemed perfectly at ease. It was a lavish dinner, excellently served and in addition very well prepared and seasoned with good conversation, very agreeable, you know. What can I say? We were human beings together. But he’s not the kind of guest to whom you’d say “it’s been fun, come again on the way back.” Once is enough! We talked about nothing serious, a lot about literature: he seemed to enjoy it and have a good time. So now you know about how I entertained him—or rather had him billeted on me. It was a nuisance, as I said, but not unpleasant.

From letters like these we can derive an incomparably vivid picture of Cicero and his world. Almost nine hundred letters were published, most after his death. If they often reveal Cicero’s weaknesses—his vanity, his inability to make a decision, his stubbornness—they confirm his humanity and sensitivity. For his contemporaries and for later ages, his chief fame was nevertheless as an orator. Although the cases and causes that prompted his speeches have ceased to have any but historical interest, the power of a Ciceronian oration can still thrill the responsive reader, especially when it is read aloud.

**Roman Philosophy and Law**

The Romans produced little in the way of original philosophical writing. Their practical nature made them suspicious of professional philosophers and unable to appreciate the rather subtle delights involved in arguing both sides of a complex moral or ethical question. In consequence most of the great Roman philosophical writers devoted their energies to expounding Greek philosophy to a Roman audience. The two principal schools of philosophy to make an impact at Rome—Epicureanism and Stoicism—were both imported from Greece.

**The Philosophy of Epicurus** Epicureanism never really gained many followers, despite the efforts of the poet Lucretius (99–55 BCE), who described its doctrines in his brilliant poem *On the Nature of Things* (*De Rerum Natura*). A remarkable synthesis of poetry and philosophy, this work alone is probably responsible for whatever admiration the Romans could muster for a system of thought so different from their own traditional virtues of simplicity and seriousness. According to Epicurus (341–271 BCE), the founder of the school (Epicureanism), the correct goal and principle of human actions is pleasure. Although Epicureanism stresses moderation and pru-

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**Voices of Their Times**

**A Dinner Party in Imperial Rome**

At the end of this course Trimalchio left the table to relieve himself, and so finding ourselves free from the constraint of his overbearing presence, we began to indulge in a little friendly conversation. Accordingly Dama began first, after calling for a cup of wine. “A day! what is a day?” he exclaimed, “before you can turn round, it’s night again! So really you can’t do better than go straight from bed to board. Fine cold weather we’ve been having; why! even my bath has hardly warmed me. But truly hot liquor is a good clothier.

I’ve been drinking bumpers [champagne], and I’m downright fuddled. The wine has got into my head.”

Seleucus then struck into the talk: “I don’t bathe every day,” he said; “your systematic bather’s a mere fuller. Water’s got teeth, and melts the heart away, a little every day; but there! when I’ve fortified my belly with a cup of mulled wine, I say ‘Go hang!’ to the cold. Indeed I couldn’t bathe today, for I’ve been to a funeral. A fine fellow he was too, good old Chrysanthus, but he’s given up the ghost now. He was calling me just this moment, only just this moment; I could fancy myself talking to him now.

Alas! alas! what are we but blown bladders on two legs? We’re not worth as much as flies; they are some use, but we’re no better than bubbles.”

“He wasn’t careful enough in his diet?”

“I tell you, for five whole days not one drop of water—or one crumb of bread—passed his lips. Nevertheless he has joined the majority. The doctors killed him, or rather his day was come; the very best of doctors is only a satisfaction to the mind. Anyhow he has joined the majority. The doctors killed him, or rather his day was come; the very best of doctors is only a satisfaction to the mind. Anyhow he was handsomely buried, on his own best bed, with good blankets. The wailing was first class—he did a trifle manumission before he died; though no doubt his wife’s tears were a bit forced. A pity he always treated her so well. But woman! woman’s of the kite kind. No man ought ever to do ’em a good turn; just as well pitch it in the well at once. Old love’s an eating sore!”

dence in the pursuit of pleasure, the Romans insisted on thinking of the philosophy as a typically Greek enthusiasm for self-indulgence and debauchery.

Lucretius tried to correct this impression by emphasizing the profoundly intellectual and rational aspects of Epicureanism. Its principal teaching was that the gods, if they exist, play no part in human affairs or in the phenomena of nature; we can therefore live our lives free from superstitious fear of the unknown and the threat of divine retribution. The Epicurean theory of matter explains the world in purely physical terms. It describes the universe as made up of two elements: small particles of matter, or atoms, and empty space. The atoms are completely solid, possessing the qualities of size, shape, and mass, and can be neither split nor destroyed. Their joining together to form complex structures is entirely caused by their random swerving in space, without interference from the gods. As a result, human life can be lived in complete freedom; we can face the challenges of existence and even natural disasters like earthquakes or plagues with complete serenity, because their occurrence is random and outside our control. According to Epicurus, at death the atoms that make up our body separate and body, mind, and soul are lost. Because no part of us is in any way immortal, we should have no fear of death, which offers no threat of punishment in a future world but rather brings only the complete ending of any sensation.

**Stoicism** Epicureanism’s rejection of a divine force in the world and its campaign against superstition probably appealed to the Romans as little as its claim that the best life was one of pleasure and calm composure. The hardheaded practical moralizing of the Roman mentality found far more appeal in the other school of philosophy imported into Rome from Greece, Stoicism. The Stoics taught that the world was governed by Reason and that Divine Providence watched over the virtuous, never allowing them to suffer evil. The key to becoming virtuous lay in willing or desiring only that which was under one’s own control. Thus riches, power, or even physical health—all subject to the whims of Fortune—were excluded as objects of desire. For the Stoic, all that counted was that which was subject to the individual’s will.

Although Stoicism had already won a following at Rome by the first century BCE and was discussed by Cicero in his philosophical writings, its chief literary exponents came slightly later. Seneca (8–65 BCE) wrote several essays on Stoic morality. He had an opportunity, and the necessity, to practice the moral fortitude about which he wrote when his former pupil, the emperor Nero, ordered him to commit suicide, since the taking of one’s own life was fully sanctioned by Stoic philosophers. Perhaps the most impressive of all Stoic writers is Epictetus (c. 50–134 CE), a former slave who established a school of philosophy in Rome and then in Greece. In his *Enchiridion* (Handbook) he recommends an absolute trust in Divine Providence to be maintained through every misfortune. For Epictetus, the philosopher represented the spokesman of Providence itself “taking the human race for his children.”

Epictetus’s teachings exerted a profound influence on the last great Stoic, emperor Marcus Aurelius (121–180 CE), who was constantly plagued with the dilemma of being a Stoic and an emperor at the same time. Delicate in health, sentimental, inclined to be disillusioned by the weaknesses of others, Marcus Aurelius struggled hard to maintain the balance between his public duty and his personal convictions. While on military duty he composed his *Meditations*, which are less a philosophical treatise than an account of his own attempt to live the life of a Stoic. As many of his observations make clear, this was no easy task: “Tell yourself every morning ‘Today I shall meet the officious, the ungrateful, the bullying, the treacherous, the envious, the selfish. All of them behave like this because they do not know the difference between good and bad.’”

Yet, even though Stoicism continued to attract some Roman intellectuals, most Romans remained immune to the appeal of the philosophical life. In the first century BCE and later, the superstition both Stoicism and Epicureanism sought to combat remained deeply ingrained in the Roman character. Festivals in honor of traditional deities were celebrated until long after the advent of Christianity (see Table 4.1). Rituals that tried to read the future by the traditional examination of animals’ entrails and other time-honored methods continued to be popular. If the Romans had paused more often to meditate on the nature of existence, they would probably have had less time to civilize the world.

**Roman Law** Among the most lasting achievements of Julius Caesar’s dictatorship and of Roman culture in general was the creation of a single unified code of civil law: the *Ius Civile*. The science of law is one of the few original creations of Roman literature. The earliest legal code of the Republic was the so-called Law of the Twelve Tables of 451–450 BCE. By the time of Caesar, however, most of this law had become either irrelevant or outdated and had been replaced by a mass of later legislation, much of it contradictory and confusing. Caesar’s *Ius Civile*, produced with the help of eminent legal experts of the day, served as the model for later

| **Table 4.1 Principal Roman Deities and Their Greek Equivalents** |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| **ROMAN**       | **GREEK**       | **ROMAN**       | **GREEK**       |
| Jupiter         | Zeus            | Diana           | Artemis         |
| Juno            | Hera            | Ceres           | Demeter         |
| Neptune         | Poseidon        | Venus           | Aphrodite       |
| Vulcan          | Hephastus       | Minerva         | Athena          |
| Mars            | Ares            | Mercury         | Hermes          |
| Apollo          | Apollo          | Bacchus         | Dionysus        |
times, receiving its final form in 533 CE, when it was collected, edited, and published by Byzantine Emperor Justinian (527–565 CE).

Justinian’s Corpus *Iuris Civilis* remained in use in many parts of Europe for centuries and profoundly influenced the development of modern legal systems. Today, millions of people live in countries whose legal systems derive from that of ancient Rome; one eminent British judge has observed of Roman law that “there is not a problem of jurisprudence which it does not touch: there is scarcely a corner of political science on which its light has not fallen.” According to the great Roman lawyer Ulpian (died 228 CE), “Law is the art of the good and the fair.” The Romans developed this art over the centuries during which they built up their empire of widely differing peoples. Roman law was international, adapting Roman notions of law and order to local conditions, and changing and developing in the process. Many of the jurists responsible for establishing legal principles had practical administrative experience from serving in the provinces. Legal experts were in great demand at Rome; the state encouraged public service, and problems of home and provincial government frequently occupied the best minds of the day. Many of these jurists acquired widespread reputations for wisdom and integrity. Emperor Augustus gave to some of them the right to issue “authoritative opinions,” while a century or so later, Emperor Hadrian formed a judicial council to guide him in matters of law. Their general aim was to equate human law with that of Nature by developing an objective system of natural justice. By using this system, the emperor could fulfill his duty to serve his subjects as benefactor and bring all peoples together under a single government.

Thus, over the centuries, the Romans built up a body of legal opinion that was comprehensive, concerned with absolute and eternal values, and valid for all times and places; at its heart lay the principle of “equity”—equality for all. By the time Justinian produced his codification, he was able to draw on a thousand years of practical wisdom.

**REPUBLICAN ART AND ARCHITECTURE**

In the visual arts as in literature, the late Republic shows the translation of Greek styles into new Roman forms. The political scene was dominated by individuals such as Cicero and Caesar; their individualism was captured in portrait busts that were both realistic and psychologically revealing. To some extent these realistic sculptures are based on such Etruscan models as the heads of the old couple on the Volterra sarcophagus (see Figure 4.6) rather than on Hellenistic portraits, which idealized their subjects. However, the subtlety and understanding shown in portraits like those of Cicero and Caesar represent a typical Roman combination and amplification of others’ styles. In many respects, Roman portraiture represents Roman art at its most creative and sensitive. It certainly opened up new expressive possibilities, as artists discovered how to use physical appearance to convey something about character. Many of the best Roman portraits serve as revealing psychological documents, expressing, for example, Cicero’s self-satisfaction as well as his humanity [Fig. 4.8]. Realistic details like the lines at the corners of the eyes and mouth, the hollows in the cheeks, or the set of the lips are used to express both outer appearance and inner character. The new skill, as it developed, could of course be put to propaganda use, and statesmen and politicians soon learned that they could project their chosen self-image through their portraits.

The powerful political figures of the period also used the medium of architecture to express their authority. The huge sanctuary constructed by Sulla at Praeneste (modern Palestrina) around 82 BCE [Fig. 4.9] has all the qualities of symmetry and grandeur we associate with later Roman imperial architecture, although it took its inspiration from massive Hellenistic building programs such as that at Pergamum. Caesar cleared a large area in the center of Rome for the construction of a forum, to be named after him. In time it was dwarfed by later monumental fora, but it had initiated the construction of public buildings for personal display and glory.
With the assassination of Julius Caesar, a brief respite from civil war was followed by further turmoil. Caesar’s lieutenant, Mark Antony, led the campaign to avenge his death and punish the conspirators. He was joined in this endeavor by Caesar’s young great-nephew, Octavius, who had been named by Caesar as his heir and who had recently arrived in Rome from the provinces. It soon became apparent that Antony and Octavius (or Octavian, to use the name he then adopted) were unlikely to coexist happily. After the final defeat of the conspirators (42 BCE), a temporary peace was obtained by putting Octavian in charge of the western provinces and sending Antony to the East. A final confrontation could not be long delayed, and Antony’s fatal involvement with Cleopatra alienated much of his support in Rome. The end came in 31 BCE at the Battle of Actium. The forces of Antony, reinforced by those of Cleopatra, were routed, and the couple committed suicide. Octavian was left as sole ruler of the Roman world, which was now in ruins. His victory marked the end of the Roman Republic.

When Octavian took supreme control after the Battle of Actium, Rome had been continuously involved in both civil and external wars for the better part of a century. The political and cultural institutions of Roman life were beyond repair, the economy was wrecked, and large areas of Italy were in complete turmoil. By the time of Octavian’s death (14 CE), Rome had achieved a peace and prosperity unequalled in its history—before or after. The art and literature created during his reign represents the peak of the Roman cultural achievement. To the Romans of his own time it seemed that a new Golden Age had dawned, and for centuries afterward his memory was revered. As the first Roman emperor, Octavian inaugurated the second great period in Roman history—the empire, which lasted technically from 27 BCE, when he assumed the title Augustus, until 476 CE, when the last Roman emperor was overthrown. In many ways, however, the period began with the Battle of Actium and continued in the subsequent western and Byzantine empires (see Table 4.2).

Augustus’s cultural achievement was stupendous, but it could only have been accomplished in a world at peace. In order to achieve this, it was necessary to build a new political order. A republican system of government suitable for a small state had long since proved woefully inadequate for a vast and multiethnic empire. Augustus tactfully, if misleadingly, claimed that he “replaced the State in the hands of the Senate and Roman people.” He in fact did the reverse: While maintaining the appearance of a reborn republic, Augustus took all effective power into his and his imperial staff’s hands.

From the time of Augustus, the emperor and his bureaucracy controlled virtually all decisions. A huge civil service developed, with various career paths. A typical middle-class Roman might begin with a period of military service, move on to a post as fiscal agent in one of the provinces, then serve in a governmental department back in Rome, and end up as a senior official in the imperial postal service or the police.

Augustus also began the reform of the army, which the central government had been unable to control during the last chaotic decades of the Republic. Its principal function now became to guard the frontiers. It was made up of some 250,000 Roman citizens, and about the same number of local recruits. The commanders of these half a million soldiers looked like...
directly to the emperor as their general-in-chief. The troops did far more than fight. They served as engineers, building roads and bridges. They sowed crops and harvested them. They surveyed the countryside and helped police it. In the process, they won widespread respect and gratitude from Rome’s provincial subjects.

Protected by the army, and administered by the civil service, the Empire expanded economically. With freedom of travel and trade, goods circulated with no tariffs or customs duties; traders only had to pay harbor dues. From the time of Augustus, the Roman road system carried increasing numbers of travelers—traders, officials, students, wandering philosophers, the couriers of banks and shipping agencies—between the great urban centers. Cities like Alexandria or Antioch were self-governing to some degree, with municipal charters giving them constitutions based on the Roman model.

Not all later emperors were as diligent or successful as Augustus. Caligula, Nero, and some others have become notorious as monsters of depravity. Yet the imperial system that Augustus founded was to last for almost five hundred years.

**Augustan Literature: Virgil**

Augustus played an active part in supporting and encouraging the writers and artists of his day; many of their works echo the chief themes of Augustan politics: the return of peace, the importance of the land and agriculture, the putting aside of ostentation and luxury in favor of a simple life, and above all the belief in Rome’s destiny as world ruler. Some of the greatest works of Roman sculpture commemorate Augustus and his deeds; Horace and Virgil sing his praises in their poems. It is sometimes said that much of this art was propaganda, organized by the emperor to present the most favorable picture possible of his reign. Even the greatest works of the time do relate in some way or other to the Augustan worldview, and it is difficult to imagine a poet whose philosophy differed radically from that of the emperor being able to give voice to it. But we have no reason to doubt the sincerity of the gratitude felt toward Augustus or the strength of what seems to have been an almost universal feeling that at last a new era had dawned. In any case, from the time of Augustus, art at Rome became largely official. Most of Roman architecture and sculpture of

**VALUES**

**Empire**

The Romans were certainly not the first people to extend their power by external conquests: from the time of ancient Egypt, ambitious rulers had sought control over weaker states. Neither was the Roman Empire the first multiethnic one. For the Greeks, Persian aggression was the one threat sufficiently strong to drive them to unite, but for many of the peoples who formed part of the Persian Empire, their conquerors’ rule was benign—not least for the Jews.

Yet no power before Rome—or since, for that matter—succeeded in ruling so vast and varied an empire for so long. In order to maintain its unity, the Romans had to devise a system of provincial government that guaranteed central control, while allowing for local differences. In the process, they developed many aspects of daily life, which foreshadow the modern world: systems of highways, a postal service, efficient food, and water distribution.

At the same time, the spread of Roman culture became an end in itself. Even in the remotest Roman cities in Europe, Asia, and North Africa, Roman theaters for the performance of Roman plays, Roman baths, a Roman forum with a temple to Jupiter of the Capitoline at its north end, and Roman schools all reinforced the sense of a dominant imperial power, symbolized in the person of the emperor.

Many later peoples aimed to repeat the Romans’ achievements. Constantine built his new capital, which became the center of the Byzantine Empire, as a “New Rome” in the East. The title that Augustus, the first emperor, assumed—Pater Patriae (Father of his native land)—was imitated by many rulers, among them Cosimo de Medici of Renaissance Florence. In nineteenth-century England, the Victorian Age owes its name to the symbolic importance of Queen Victoria, whose crowning glory was to become “Empress of India,” while the use of cultural unity to underpin political stability soon became a feature of the growth of the United States. Many of the political characteristics of the young Republic were borrowed by the Founding Fathers from Rome: The U.S. Senate and Congress are based on the Roman Senate and Assembly of the People, while the separation of federal and state government reflects the Romans’ distinction between central and provincial rule.
the period was public, commissioned by the state, and served state purposes.

The greater the artist, the more subtle the response to the Augustan vision. Virgil, the greatest of all Roman poets, whose full name was Publius Virgilius Maro (70–19 BCE), devoted the last ten years of his life to the composition of an epic poem intended to honor Rome and, by implication, Augustus. The result was the *Aeneid*, one of the great poems of the world, not completely finished at the poet’s death. For much of the Middle Ages, Virgil was held in the highest reverence. A succession of great poets have regarded him as their master: Dante, Tasso, and Milton, among others. Probably no work of literature in the entire tradition of Western culture has been more loved and revered than the *Aeneid*—described by T. S. Eliot as the classic of Western society—but its significance is complex and by no means universally agreed upon.

The *Aeneid* was not Virgil’s first poem. The earliest authentic works that have survived are ten short pastoral poems known as the *Eclogues* (sometimes called the *Bucolics*), which deal with the joys and sorrows of the country and the shepherds and herdsmen who live there. Virgil was the son of a farmer; his deep love of the land emerges also in his next work, the four books of the *Georgics* (29 BCE). Their most obvious purpose is to serve as a practical guide to farming; they offer helpful advice on such subjects as cattle breeding and beekeeping as well as a deep conviction that the strength of Italy lies in its agricultural richness. In a great passage in Book II of the *Georgics*, Virgil hails the “ancient earth, great mother of crops and men.” He does not disguise the hardships of the farmer’s life, the poverty, hard work, and frequent disappointments, but still feels that only life in the country brings true peace and contentment [Fig. 4.10].

**Virgil’s Aeneid** The spirit of the *Georgics* clearly matched Augustus’s plans for an agricultural revival. The emperor probably commissioned Virgil to write an epic poem that would be to Roman literature what the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were for Greek literature: a national epic. The task was immense. Virgil had to find a subject that would do appropriate honor to Rome and its past as well as commemorate the achievements of Augustus. The *Aeneid* is not a perfect poem (on his deathbed Virgil ordered his friends to destroy it), but in some ways it surpasses even the high expectations Augustus must have had for it. Virgil succeeded in providing Rome with its national epic and stands as a worthy successor to Homer. At the same time, he created a profoundly moving study of the nature of human destiny and personal responsibility.

The *Aeneid* is divided into twelve books. Its hero is a Trojan prince, Aeneas, who flees from the ruins of burning Troy and sails west to Italy to found a new city, the predecessor of Rome. Virgil’s choice was significant: Aeneas’s Trojan birth establishes connections with the world of Homer; his arrival in Italy involves the origins of Rome; and the theme of a fresh beginning born, as it were, out of the ashes of the past corresponds perfectly to the Augustan mood of revival. We first meet Aeneas and his followers in the middle of his journey from Troy to Italy, caught in a storm that casts them upon the coast of North Africa. They make their way to the city of Carthage, where they are given shelter by the Carthaginian ruler, Queen Dido. At a dinner in his honor, Aeneas describes the fall of Troy (Book II) and his wanderings from Troy to Carthage (Book III), in the course of which his father Anchises had died.
In Book IV, perhaps the best known, the action resumes where it had broken off at the end of Book I. The tragic love that develops between Dido and Aeneas tempts Aeneas to stay in Carthage and thereby abandon his mission to found a new home in Italy. Mercury, the divine messenger of the gods, is sent to remind Aeneas of his responsibilities. He leaves after an agonizing encounter with Dido, and the distraught queen kills herself.

Book V brings the Trojans to Italy. In Book VI, Aeneas journeys to the underworld to hear from the spirit of his father the destiny of Rome. This tremendous episode provides the turning point of the poem. Before it we see Aeneas, and he sees himself, as a man prone to human weaknesses and subject to personal feelings. After Anchises’ revelations, Aeneas’s humanity is replaced by a sense of mission, and the weary, suffering Trojan exile becomes transformed into a “man of destiny.”

In Books VII and VIII, the Trojans arrive at the river Tiber, and Aeneas visits the future site of Rome while the Italian peoples prepare to resist the Trojan invaders. The last four books describe in detail the war between the Trojans and the Latins, in the course of which there are losses on both sides. The Aeneid ends with the death of the great Italian warrior Turnus and the final victory of Aeneas.

It is tempting to see Aeneas as the archetype of Augustus; certainly Virgil must have intended for us to draw some parallels. Other historical analogies can also be found: Dido and Cleopatra, for example, have much in common. The Aeneid is, however, far more than an allegorical retelling of the events leading up to the foundation of the Empire. Put briefly, Aeneas takes a responsibility for which initially he has no real enthusiasm and which costs him and others considerable suffering. It would have been much easier for him to have stayed in Carthage or settled somewhere else along his way, rather than push forward under difficult circumstances into a foreign land where he and his followers were not welcome.

Once he has accepted his mission, however, Aeneas fulfills it conscientiously and in the process learns to sublimate his own personal desires to a common good. If this is a portrait of Augustus, it represents a far more complex view of his character than we might expect, and Virgil goes further. If greatness can only be acquired by sacrificing human individuals, is it worth the price? Is the future glory of Rome a sufficient excuse for the cruel and unmanly treatment of Dido? Readers will provide their own answers. Virgil’s responses might have been that the sacrifices were probably worth it, but barely. Much depends on individual views on the nature and purpose of existence, and for Virgil there is no doubt that life is essentially tragic. The prevailing mood of the poem is one of melancholy regret for the sadness of human lives and the inevitability of human suffering.

**Augustan Sculpture**

Many of the characteristics of Virgil’s poetry can also be found in contemporary sculpture. In a relief from one of the most important works of the period, the *Ara Pacis* (*Altar of Peace*), Aeneas performs a sacrifice on his arrival in Italy before a small shrine that contains two sacred images brought from Troy [*Fig. 4.11*]. More significantly, the *Ara Pacis* depicts the abundance of nature that could flourish again in the peace of the Augustan Age. The altar, begun on Augustus’s return to Rome in 13 BCE after a visit to the provinces, was dedicated on January 30, 9 BCE, at a ceremony that is shown in the surrounding reliefs [*Fig. 4.12*]. The procession making its way to the sacrifice is divided into two parts. On the south side, Augustus leads the way, accompanied by priests and followed by the members of his family; the north side shows senators and other dignitaries. The lower part of the walls is decorated with a rich band of fruit and floral motifs, luxuriantly intertwined, amid which swans are placed. The actual entrance to the altar is flanked by two reliefs—one on the right, the one showing Aeneas, and on the left, Romulus and Remus.

The *Ara Pacis* is perhaps the single most comprehensive statement of how Augustus wanted his contemporaries and future generations to view his reign. The altar is dedicated neither to Jupiter or Mars nor to Augustus but to the spirit of Peace. Augustus is shown as the first among equals rather than supreme ruler; although he leads the procession, he is marked by no special richness of dress. The presence of Augustus’s family indicates that he intends his successor to be drawn from among them and that they have a special role to play in public affairs. The reliefs of Aeneas and of Romulus and Remus relate the entire ceremony to Rome’s glorious past. Further scenes at the back showing the Earth Mother and the goddess of war emphasize the abundance of the land and the need for vigilance. The rich vegetation of the lower band is a constant reminder of the rewards of agriculture that can be enjoyed once more in the peace to which the whole altar is dedicated.

Amazingly enough, this detailed political and social message is expressed without pretentiousness and with superb workmanship. The style is deliberately and self-consciously “classical,” based on works like the Parthenon frieze. To depict the New Golden Age of Augustus, his artists have chosen the artistic language of the Golden Age of Athens, although with a Roman accent. The figures in the procession, for instance, are portrayed far more realistically than those in the sculpture of fifth-century BCE Athens.

The elaborate message illustrated by the *Ara Pacis* can also be seen in the best-preserved statue of the emperor, the *Augustus of Prima Porta*, so-called after the spot where an imperial villa containing the sculpture
◆ 4.11 Aeneas Performs a Sacrifice, 13–9 BCE. Aeneas (right) is shown in the manner of a Classical Greek god. The landscape and elaborate relief detail are typical of late Hellenistic art.

Detail from the Ara Pacis Augustae. Marble, 5’ 3” (1.6 m) high. © Ara Pacis, Rome, Italy/The Bridgeman Art Library

◆ 4.12 Ara Pacis Augustae, 13–9 BCE. The central doorway, through which the altar is just visible, is flanked by reliefs showing Romulus and Remus and Aeneas. On the right side is the procession of the imperial family led by Augustus. The altar originally stood on Rome’s ancient Via Flaminia. Fragments were discovered in the 16th century; the remaining pieces were located in 1937 and 1938, and the structure was reconstructed near the mausoleum of Augustus.

Marble, 36’ x 33’ (11 x 10 m). Museum of the Ara Pacis, Rome, Italy/© Scala/Art Resource, NY
was excavated [Fig. 4.13]. The statue probably dates from about the time of the emperor’s death; the face is in the full vigor of life, calm and determined. The stance is one of quiet authority. The ornately carved breastplate recalls one of the chief events of Augustus’s reign. In 20 BCE he defeated the Parthians, an eastern tribe, and recaptured from them the Roman standards that had been lost in battle in 53 BCE. On that former occasion, Rome had suffered one of the greatest military defeats in its history, and Augustus’s victory played an important part in restoring national pride. The breastplate shows a bearded Parthian handing back the eagle-crowned standard to a Roman soldier. The cupid on a dolphin at Augustus’s feet serves two purposes. The symbol of the goddess Venus, it connects Augustus and his family with Aeneas, who, like Cupid, was a child of the goddess Venus.

The Evidence of Pompeii

The first and second centuries CE are probably the best-documented times in the whole of classical antiquity. From the main literary sources and the wealth of art and architecture that has survived, it is possible to reconstruct a detailed picture of life in imperial Rome. Even more complete is our knowledge of a prosperous but unimportant little town some 150 miles (240 km) south of Rome that owes its worldwide fame to the circumstances of its destruction [Fig. 4.14]. On August 24 in the year 79 CE, the volcano Vesuvius above the Gulf of Naples erupted and a few small towns were buried, the nearer ones under flowing lava and those some distance away under pumice and ash. By far the most famous is Pompeii, situated some ten miles (16 km) southeast of the erupting peak. Excavation first began there more than two hundred years ago. The finds preserved by the volcanic debris give us a rich and vivid impression of the way of life in a provincial town of the early Empire—from the temples in which the Pompeians worshiped and the baths in which they cleansed themselves to their food on the fatal day [Figs. 4.15, 4.16, and 4.17].

An eyewitness report about the eruption comes from two letters written by the Roman politician and literary figure Pliny the Younger (62–before 114 CE)—so-called to distinguish him from his uncle, Pliny the Elder (23–79 CE). The two were in fact together at Misenum on the Bay of Naples on the day of the eruption. Pliny’s uncle was much interested in natural phenomena (his chief work was a Natural History in thirty-seven volumes); to investigate for himself the nature of the explosion, he made his way toward Vesuvius, where he was suffocated to death by the fumes. The younger Pliny stayed behind with his mother, and in a letter to the historian Tacitus a little while later described the events of the next few hours.

Pliny the Younger: Letter to Tacitus on the Eruption of Vesuvius

You say that the letter I wrote at your request about the death of my uncle makes you want to hear about the terrors, and dangers as well, which I endured, having been left behind at Misenum—I had started on that topic but broken off.
Excavated Portions of Pompeii, Italy. This aerial view of Pompeii as it appears today shows the theater in the foreground and Mount Vesuvius’s two peaks in the rear; the volcano’s crater lies between the peaks. The total area is 166 acres (67.23 ha). Although excavations at Pompeii have been in progress for more than two hundred years, some two-fifths of the city is still buried. (© O. Louis Mazzatenta/National Geographic/Getty Images)

Temple of Apollo, 1st century BCE. A statue of Apollo stands on the east side of the temple in the ruins of Pompeii, Italy. (© G. R. Richardson/Getty Images)

Victims of Mt. Vesuvius Eruption, Pompeii, Italy, 79 CE. Smothered in volcanic pumice during the eruption, these people were found near a gate in the walls, where they were trying to push their way out of the darkness and blinding waves of hot volcanic dust. In the end they were knocked to the ground, although the man at the back seems to be trying to pull himself up. The technique for recovering and reconstructing human remains found during excavation was first invented in the late 19th century and has been improving ever since. (© Leonard Von Matt/Photo Researchers, Inc.)

Carbonized Food, Pompeii, Italy, August 24, 79 CE. Most of the foods—like these charred nuts, olives, and a complete cake or loaf of bread—were found preserved under the eruption’s ashes on tables set for breakfast the morning of the eruption.

© Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples, Italy / © Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY
“Though my mind shudders to remember, I shall begin.” After my uncle departed I spent the rest of the day on my studies; it was for that purpose I had stayed. Then I took a bath, ate dinner, and went to bed; but my sleep was restless and brief. For a number of days before this there had been a quivering of the ground, not so fearful because it was common in Campania. On that night, however, it became so violent that everything seemed not so much to move as to be overturned.

My mother came rushing into my bedroom; I was just getting up, intending in my turn to arouse her if she were asleep. We sat down in the rather narrow courtyard of the house lying between the sea and the buildings. I don’t know whether I should call it iron nerves or folly—I was only seventeen: I called for a book of Titus Livy and as if at ease I read it and even copied some passages, as I had been doing. Then one of my uncle’s friends, who had recently come from Spain to visit him, when he saw my mother and me sitting there, and me actually reading a book, rebuked her apathy and my unconcern. But I was as intent on my book as ever.

It was now the first hour of day, but the light was still faint and doubtful. The adjacent buildings now began to collapse, and there was great, indeed inevitable, danger of being involved in the ruins; for though the place was open, it was narrow. Then at last we decided to leave the town. The dismayed crowd came after us; it preferred following someone else’s decision rather than its own; in panic that is practically the same as wisdom. So as we went off we were crowded and shoved along by a huge mob of followers. When we got out beyond the buildings we halted. We saw many strange fearful sights there. For the carriages we had ordered brought for us, though on perfectly level ground, kept rolling back and forth; even when the wheels were checked with stones they would not stand still. Moreover the sea appeared to be sucked back and to be repelled by the vibration of the earth; the shoreline was much farther out than usual, and many specimens of marine life were caught on the dry sands. On the other side a black and frightful cloud, rent by twisting and quivering paths of fire, gaped open in huge patterns of flames; it was like sheet lightning, but far worse. Then indeed that friend from Spain whom I have mentioned spoke to us more sharply and insistently: “If your brother and uncle still lives, he wants you to be saved; if he has died, his wish was that you should survive him; so why do you delay to make your escape?” We replied that we would not allow ourselves to think of our own safety while still uncertain of his. Without waiting any longer he rushed off and left the danger behind at top speed.

Soon thereafter the cloud I have described began to descend to the earth and to cover the sea; it had encircled Capri and hidden it from view, and had blotted out the promontory of Misenum. Then my mother began to plead, urge, and order me to make my escape as best I could, for I could, being young; she, weighed down with years and weakness, would die happy if she had not been the cause of death to me. I replied that I would not find safety except in her company; then I took her hand and made her walk faster. She obeyed with difficulty and scolded herself for slowing me. Now ashes, though thin as yet, began to fall. I looked back; a dense fog was looming up behind us; it poured over the ground like a river as it followed. “Let us turn aside,” said I, “lest, if we should fall on the road, we should be trampled in the darkness by the throng of those going our way.” We barely had time to consider the thought, when night was upon us, not such a night as when there is no moon or there are clouds, but such as in a closed place with the lights put out. One could hear the wailing of women, the crying of children, the shouting of men; they called each other, some their parents, others their children, still others their mates, and sought to recognize each other by their voices. Some lamented their own fate, others the fate of their loved ones. There were even those who in fear of death prayed for death. Many raised their hands to the gods; more held that there were nowhere gods any more and that this was that eternal and final night of the universe. Nor were those lacking who exaggerated real dangers with feigned and lying terrors. Men appeared who reported that part of Misenum was buried in ruins, and part of it in flames; it was false, but found credulous listeners.

It lightened a little; this seemed to us not daylight but a sign of approaching fire. But the fire stopped some distance away; darkness came on again, again ashes, thick and heavy. We got up repeatedly to shake these off; otherwise we would have been buried and crushed by the weight. I might boast that not a groan, not a cowardly word, escaped from my lips in the midst of such dangers, were it not that I believed I was perishing along with everything else, and everything else along with me; a wretched and yet a real consolation for having to die. At last the fog dissipated into smoke or mist, and then vanished; soon there was real daylight; the sun even shone, though wanly, as when there is an eclipse. Our still trembling eyes found everything changed, buried in deep ashes as if in snow. We returned to Misenum and attended to our physical needs as best we could; then we spent a night in suspense between hope and fear. Fear was the stronger, for the trembling of the earth continued, and many, crazed by their sufferings, were mocking their own woes and others’ by awful predictions. But as for us, though we had suffered dangers and anticipated others, we had not even then any thought of going away until we should have word of my uncle.

You will read this account, far from worthy of history, without any intention of incorporating it; and you must blame yourself, since you insisted on having it, if it shall seem not even worthy of a letter.

With a few exceptions, like the frescoes in the Villa of the Mysteries [Fig. 4.18], the works of art unearthed at Pompeii are not masterpieces. Their importance lies precisely in the fact that they show us how the ordinary Pompeian lived, worked, and played. The general picture is impressive. Cool, comfortable houses were decorated with charming frescoes and mosaics and included quiet gardens, remote from the noise of busy streets and watered by fountains [Fig. 4.19]. The household silver and other domestic ornaments found in the ruins of houses were often of high quality. Although the population of Pompeii was only twenty thousand, there were no fewer than three sets of public baths, a theater, a concert hall, an amphitheater large enough to seat the entire population, and a more than adequate number of brothels. The forum was closed to traffic, and the major
4.18 Fresco, Villa of the Mysteries, c. 60 BCE. Probably no ancient work of art has been more argued about than these paintings. They seem to relate to the cult of the Greek god Dionysus and the importance of the cult for girls approaching marriage, but many of the details are difficult to interpret. There is no argument, however, about the high quality of the paintings.

Fresco, frieze 5' 4" (1.6 m) high, Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii, Italy // © Scala/Art Resource, NY

4.19 Atrium, House of the Silver Wedding, Pompeii, Italy, 1st century CE. The open plan of substantial houses such as this helped keep the interior cool in summer; the adjoining rooms were closed off by folding doors in winter. (© Scala/Art Resource, NY)

Public buildings ranged around it include a splendid basilica or large hall that served as both stock exchange and law courts. Life must have been extremely comfortable at Pompeii, even though it was by no means the most prosperous of the towns buried by Vesuvius. Although only a small part of Herculaneum has been excavated, some mansions found there far surpass the houses of Pompeii. In the past few years, work has begun at Oplontis, where a superbly decorated villa has already come to light.

Apart from its historic importance, the excavation of Pompeii in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries
CHAPTER 4 The Roman Legacy

4.20 Model Reconstruction of Ancient Rome c. 320 CE. In the lower right is the Pantheon (see Figure 4.23), with the Colosseum in the upper left and the Circus Maximus to its right. Museo della Civiltà Romana, Rome, Italy/© Scala/Art Resource, NY

4.21 Arch of Titus, Rome, Italy, 81 CE. Roman arches commemorated victories by successful generals. This arch celebrates the victory of Titus, son of the reigning emperor Vespasian, over the Jews in 70 CE—a victory that saw the destruction of Solomon’s Temple when Titus’s army captured the city of Jerusalem. While early Imperial arches resembled this one, those built later generally had a large central arch flanked by two smaller ones. Marble, 47’ 4” (14.43 m) high. © Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

4.22 Arch Construction. Top: Simple arch composed of wedge-shaped blocks (voussoirs) and keystone; the curve of the arch rises from the springers on either side. Center: Tunnel (barrel vault) composed of a series of arches. Bottom: Dome composed of a series of arches intersecting around a central axis.

had a profound effect on contemporary writers and artists. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe visited the site in 1787 and wrote of the buried city that “of all the disasters there have been in this world, few have provided so much delight to posterity.” Johann Winckelmann (1717–1768), sometimes called the father of archaeology and art history, used material from the excavations in his History of Ancient Art. Artists such as Ingres, David, and Canova were influenced by Pompeian paintings and sculptures; on a more popular level, a style of Wedgwood china was based on Pompeian motifs. Countless poets and novelists of the nineteenth century either set episodes in the excavations at Pompeii or tried to imagine what life there was like in Roman times.

ROMAN IMPERIAL ARCHITECTURE

All the charm and comfort of Pompeii pale before the grandeur of imperial Rome, where both public buildings and private houses were constructed in numbers and on a scale that still remains impressive [Fig. 4.20]. The Roman achievement in both architecture and engineering had a lasting effect on the development of later architectural styles. In particular their use of
the arch, probably borrowed from the Etruscans, was widely imitated, and pseudo-Roman triumphal arches have sprung up in such unlikely places as the Champs Elysées in Paris and Washington Square in New York. The original triumphal arches commemorated military victories [Fig. 4.21]; each was a permanent version of the temporary wooden arch erected to celebrate the return to the capital of a victorious general.

Equally important was the use of internal arches and vaults [Fig. 4.22] to provide roofs for structures of increasing size and complexity. Greek and Republican Roman temples had been relatively small, partly because of the difficulties involved in roofing over a large space without supports. With the invention of concrete in the first century BCE and growing understanding of the principles of stress and counter-stress, Roman architects were able to experiment with elaborate new forms, many of which—like the barrel vault and the dome—were to pass into the Western architectural tradition.

The Greeks rarely built arches, but the Etruscans used them as early as the fifth century BCE, and the Romans may well have borrowed the arch from them. From the second century BCE on, stone arches were used regularly for bridges and aqueducts. Vaults of small size were often used for domestic buildings, and by the time of Augustus, architects had begun to construct larger-scale barrel vaults, semicylindrical in shape, two or more of which could intersect to roof a large area. The dome, which is really a hemispherical vault, became increasingly popular with the building of the vast public baths of Imperial Rome. Using both bricks and concrete, architects could combine vaults, barrel vaults, and domes to construct elaborate buildings capable of holding thousands of people at a time. The inside and outside surfaces of the buildings were then covered with a marble facing to conceal the elaborate internal support structures.

Much of the work of these architects was destroyed during the Barbarian invasions of the fifth and sixth centuries CE, and more was wrecked in the Renaissance by builders removing bricks or marble. By great good fortune, one of the most superb of all imperial structures has been preserved almost intact. The Pantheon [Fig. 4.23] was built around 126 CE, during the reign of Hadrian (117–138 CE) to a design by the...
Corinthian capital. This elaborate bell-shaped design, decorated with acanthus leaves, first became commonly used in Hellenistic times. It was especially popular with Roman architects who generally preferred it to both the Doric and Ionic styles.

The Imperial Fora. Unlike the Republican forum, which served as a public meeting place, the imperial fora were huge complexes constructed as monuments to the emperors who commissioned them. Note the Forum of Trajan (Forum Traiani), one of the largest, in the upper portion. The Pantheon was dwarfed by the huge complex of buildings that made up the imperial fora. Completed by the beginning of the second century CE, they formed a vast architectural design unsurpassed in antiquity and barely equaled since. Elsewhere in the city, baths, theaters, temples, racetracks, and libraries catered to the needs and fancies of a huge urban population. In many of these structures, builders continued to experiment with new techniques of construction, and architectural principles developed in Rome were applied throughout the Roman Empire. From Spain to the Middle East, theaters, amphitheaters, and other public buildings were erected according to the same basic designs, leaving a permanent record of construction methods for later generations.

Urban life on such a scale required a constant supply of one of the basic human necessities: water. Their system of aqueducts is one of the most impressive of the Romans' engineering achievements. A vast network of pipes brought millions of gallons of water a day into Rome, distributing it to public fountains and baths and to the private villas of the wealthy. At the same time, a system of covered street drains was built, eliminating the open sewers that had been usual before Roman times. These open drains were to return during the medieval period, when many of the Roman engineering skills were lost.

With the passage of time, most of the aqueducts that supplied ancient Rome have been demolished or have collapsed. Elsewhere in the Roman Empire, however,
examples have survived that give some idea of Roman engineering skill. The famous Pont du Gard [Fig. 4.26], which can still be seen in southern France, was probably first constructed during the reign of Augustus. It carried the aqueduct that supplied the Roman city of Nîmes with water—a hundred gallons (387.5 liters) a day—for each inhabitant and was made of uncemented stone. The largest blocks weigh two tons (1.8 MT).

Even with the provision of such facilities, Imperial Rome suffered from overcrowding. The average Roman lived in an apartment block, of which there were some 45,000. Most of these have long since disappeared, although their appearance can be reconstructed from examples excavated at Ostia, Rome’s port [Fig. 4.27]. The height of the apartment blocks was controlled by law to prevent the construction of unsafe buildings, but it was not unheard of for a building to collapse, and fire was a constant danger. No doubt the grandeur of the public buildings in Rome was intended at least in part to distract the poorer Romans from thoughts of their humble private residences.

**4.26** Aqueduct Pont du Gard, c. 16 CE. Note the careful positioning of the three rows of arches along the top, which carried the water channel. The entire aqueduct was 25 miles (40 km) long. This section carried the water over the canyon of the Gardon River.

Near Nîmes (ancient Nemausus), France. Stone block, 902´ (274.93 m) long, 161´ (49.07 m) high, each large arch spanning some 82´ (25 m). © DeA Picture Library/Art Resource, NY

**4.27** Model Reconstruction of a Roman Apartment Block, 2nd century CE. Shown here is a reconstruction of an *insula*—a multistory, brick-faced, concrete apartment house—in Ostia, the seaport of ancient Rome. As can be seen from the size of the windows, the ground floor, which was intended for shops, was more spacious with higher ceilings. The apartments on the floors above were cramped; few had private toilet facilities.

*Museo della Civiltà Romana, Rome, Italy/© Scala/Art Resource, NY*
Rome as the Object of Satire

Life in this huge metropolis had many of the problems of big-city living today: noise, traffic jams, dirty streets, and overcrowding were all constant sources of complaint. A particularly bitter protest comes from the Roman satirist Juvenal (c. 60–c. 130 CE). Born in the provinces, he came to Rome, where he served as a magistrate and irritated the then-current emperor, Domitian—not a difficult task. After a period of exile, probably in Egypt, he returned to Rome and lived in considerable poverty. Toward the end of his life, however, his circumstances improved. His sixteen Satires make it perfectly clear that Juvenal liked neither Rome nor Romans. He tells us that he writes out of fierce outrage at the corruption and decadence of his day, the depraved aristocracy, the general greed and meanness. “At such a time who could not write satire?” His fiercest loathing is reserved for foreigners, although in the sixth satire he launches a particularly virulent attack against women in one of the archetypal documents of misogyny.

Juvénal does not emerge as a pleasant character, and his obsessive hatred frequently verges on the psychopathic. As a satirical poet, though, he is among the greatest in Western literature, and he strongly influenced many of his successors, including Jonathan Swift. Few other writers can make better or more powerful use of biting sarcasm, irony, and outright invective.

The End of the Roman Empire

Few historical subjects have been as much discussed as the fall of the Roman Empire. It is not even possible to agree on when it fell, let alone why. The traditional date—476 CE—marks the deposition of the last Roman emperor, Romulus Augustulus. By that time, however, the political unity of the empire had already disintegrated. Perhaps the beginning of the end was 330 CE, when Emperor Constantine moved the capital from Rome to a new city on the Bosporus, Constantinople, although in another sense the transfer represented a new development as much as a conclusion. It might even be possible to argue that Constantine’s successors
in the East, the Byzantine emperors, were the successors of Augustus and that a tradition continues from the beginning of the Empire in 31 BCE to the fall of Constantinople in 1453 CE.

Fascinating though the question may be, in a sense it is theoretical rather than practical. The Roman Empire did not fall overnight. Many of the causes for its long decline are obvious, though not always easy to order in importance. One crucial factor was the growing power and changing character of the army. The larger it became, the more necessary it was to recruit troops from the more distant provinces—Germans, Illyrians, and others, the very people the army was supposed to be holding in check. Most of these soldiers had never been anywhere near Rome. They felt no loyalty to the empire, no reason to defend Roman interests. A succession of emperors had to buy their support by raising their pay and promising gifts of lands. At the same time, the army came to play an increasingly prominent part in the choice of a new emperor and, because the army was largely non-Roman, so were many of the emperors chosen. Rulers of the third and fourth centuries included Africans, Thracians, a Syrian, and an Arab—men unlikely to feel any strong reason to place the interests of Rome over those of themselves and their own men.

Throughout this late period, the empire was increasingly threatened from outside. To the west, barbarian tribes like the Huns, the Goths, and the Alemanni began to penetrate farther and farther into its defenses and even to sack Rome. Meanwhile, in the east, Roman armies were continually involved in resisting the growing power of the Persians. In many parts of the empire it became clear that Rome could provide no help against invaders, and some of the provinces set themselves up as independent states with their own armies.

Problems like these inevitably had a devastating effect on the economy. Taxes increased and the value of money depreciated. The constant threat of invasion or civil war made trade impossible. What funds there were went for the support of the army, and the general standard of living suffered a steady decline. The eastern provinces, the old Hellenistic kingdoms, suffered rather less than the rest of the empire, because they were protected in part by the wealth accumulated over the centuries and by their long tradition of civilization. As a result, Italy sank to the level of a province rather than remaining the center of the imperial administration.

Total collapse was prevented by the efforts of two emperors: Diocletian, who ruled from 284 to 305 CE, and Constantine, who ruled from 306 to 337. Both men were masterly organizers who realized that the only way to save the empire was to impose the most stringent controls on every aspect of life—social, administrative, and economic. In 301 CE, the Edict of Diocletian was passed, establishing fixed maximums for the sale of goods and for wages. A vast bureaucracy was set up to collect taxes and administer the provinces. The emperor became once again the focal point of the empire, but to protect himself from the dangers of coups and assassinations, he never appeared in public. As a result, an elaborate court with complex rituals developed, and the emperor’s claim to semi-divine status invested him with a new religious authority.

Late Roman Art and Architecture

Even if the emperor did not show himself to his subjects, he could impress them in other ways, and the reigns of Diocletian and Constantine marked the last great age of Roman architecture. The immense Basilica of Constantine [Fig. 4.28], with its central nave rising to a height of 100 feet (30.5 meters), is now in ruins, but in its day this assembly hall must have been a powerful reminder of the emperor’s authority. It also contained a 30-foot (9.2 m) statue of the emperor [Fig. 4.29]. The palace
Diocletian built at Split, on the Adriatic coast, is constructed on the plan of a military camp, with enormous central avenues dividing it into four quarters [Fig. 4.30]. The decoration uses eastern motifs, and the entire design is far from the Classical style of earlier times.

In sculpture, too, Classical forms and styles were increasingly abandoned. Realistic portraiture and naturalistic drapery were neglected, and sculptors no longer tried to express depth or reality in their relief carving. The lack of perspective and precision in their work foreshadows the art of the early Middle Ages [Fig. 4.31].

The general abandonment of Classical ideas these artistic changes indicate went along with a waning of interest in Stoicism and Epicureanism and a new enthusiasm for Eastern religious cults. Traditional Roman religion had always been organized by the state, and from the time of the late Republic, some Romans had sought a more personal religious satisfaction in the worship of Eastern deities. During the last stages of the empire, strong cults developed around the Phrygian goddess Cybele, the Egyptian Isis, and the sun god Mithras.

The appearance and eventual triumph of Christianity is outside the scope of this account, but its emergence as the official religion of the empire played a final and decisive part in ending the Classical era. Pagan art, pagan literature, and pagan culture as a whole represented forces and ideals that Christianity strongly rejected, and the art of the early Christians is fundamentally different in its inspiration. Yet even the fathers of the early church, implacable opponents of paganism, could not fail to be moved by the end of so great a cultural tradition.

The memory of Rome’s greatness lived on through the succeeding ages of turmoil and achievement and the Classical spirit survived, to be reborn triumphantly in the Renaissance.
SUMMARY

◆ The Monarchy. The vast extent of ancient Roman history—more than twelve hundred years—can be conveniently divided into three chief periods: the Monarchy (753–510 BCE), the Republic (509–31 BCE), and the Empire (31 BCE–476 CE). The city was founded in the mid-eighth century, around the time the Greeks were setting up colonies in southern Italy and Sicily. Rome’s first inhabitants were Latins, an Italian people native to central Italy, after whom the Roman language is named. Traditional accounts of the city’s origins claimed that its first rulers were a series of seven kings. The first four were Latin, but in 616 BCE, Rome fell under Etruscan control.

◆ Rome Under the Etruscans. The Etruscans had developed in the region of central Italy to the north of Rome, although their origins are uncertain; they may have migrated to Italy from western Asia. Etruscan art was strongly influenced by Greek and Orientalizing styles. Among the most striking works to survive are the tomb paintings at Tarquinia, one of the principal Etruscan cities, and the sculpture from the temple of Apollo at Veii. Although many Etruscan inscriptions can be deciphered, no Etruscan literature has been discovered. For the century during which they ruled Rome, the Etruscans expanded its trade contacts and introduced important technological innovations. In 510 BCE, the Romans drove out the last Etruscan king.

◆ The Beginnings of the Roman Republic. In 509 BCE the Roman Republic was declared. The political system of the new state evolved from the need to achieve a balance of political power between the two classes of citizens: the aristocrats (patricians) and the people (plebeians). There gradually developed two political institutions, the Senate and the assembly of the people, while plebeians eventually won the right to run for election to virtually all offices of state. The growth of internal political stability was accompanied by the spread of Roman power throughout Italy. Among those to fall under Roman domination were the Etruscans, their former rulers. Little in the way of art or literature has survived from this early period, and most of what was produced seems to have been inspired by Etruscan or, more generally, Greek models.

◆ Roman Expansion in the Mediterranean. In 264 BCE a series of wars (the Punic wars) began between Rome and her chief rival in the western Mediterranean, Carthage. By 201 BCE the Romans had proved victorious, and Roman colonies were established in Spain and North Africa. Throughout the following century Roman power spread eastward. In 146 BCE Greece was absorbed into the Roman Empire, and the Hellenistic kingdom of Pergamum was bequeathed to Rome by its last king, Attalus III, on his death in 133 BCE. The second century BCE also saw the beginnings of the development of an independent Roman culture, although Greek influence remained strong. The Roman poet Ennius composed his epic, the Annals, while Plautus and Terence wrote comedies based on Greek originals. Greek music became popular in Rome, and the two chief schools of Greek philosophy, Stoicism and Epicureanism, began to attract Roman adherents.

◆ The Collapse of the Republic. With such vast territorial expansion, strains began to appear in Roman political and social life. The growth of a middle class, the equestrian, disturbed the old equilibrium, and the last century of the Republic (133–31 BCE) was beset by continual crisis. A succession of powerful figures—Marius, Sulla, Pompey, Caesar—struggled to assume control of the state. The last of these proved victorious in 48 BCE, only to be assassinated four years later. Amid bitter fighting between Mark Antony, Caesar’s lieutenant, and Octavius, the late dictator’s nephew and heir, the Republic collapsed.

The political confusion of the Republic’s last century was accompanied by important cultural developments. Among the major literary figures of the age were the Epicurean poet Lucretius, the lyric poet Catullus, and the orator and politician Cicero. Caesar combined his political and military career with the writing of accounts of his campaigns. In the visual arts realistic portrait sculpture became common, while the invention of concrete was to have enormous consequences, both for Roman building and for the history of all later architecture in the West. Sulla’s great Sanctuary at Praeneste inaugurated the tradition of large-scale public building projects that became common during the empire.

◆ The Augustan Age. In 31 BCE Octavius defeated the combined forces of Antony and Cleopatra to emerge as sole ruler of the Roman world; in 27 BCE, under the name Augustus, he became its first emperor. The Augustan Age marked the high point of Roman art and literature, and many of its finest achievements were produced to celebrate the Augustan revolution. Virgil was commissioned to write a Roman national epic: The result was the Aeneid. Augustus was portrayed in numerous statues and portraits, including the Augustus of Prima Porta, and in the relief on the Ara Pacis. Important public works included the Pont du Gard near Nîmes, France.

◆ Life, Art, and Literature in the Early Empire. From the time of Augustus until 476 CE, the empire was ruled by a series of emperors who depended increasingly on an elaborate state bureaucracy. Augustus and his first four successors were from a single family, but with time emperors either seized
power for themselves or were imposed by the army. The empire continued to expand until the reign of Hadrian (117–138 CE), who fixed its borders to achieve stability abroad. Some idea of the character of provincial daily life in the Empire can be gained from the excavations at Pompeii and the other cities around the Bay of Naples that were destroyed by an eruption of the volcano Vesuvius in 79 CE. Writers of the early empire include the historian Tacitus and the satirist Juvenal. Among the most impressive works of architecture of the period is the Pantheon, designed by Hadrian, which makes bold use of concrete.

The Roman Empire in Decline. The third century was marked by continual struggles for imperial power. Only Emperor Diocletian (284–305 CE) managed to restore order by massive administrative and economic reform. After Diocletian’s retirement to his palace at Split, one of his successors, Constantine (307–337 CE), transferred the imperial capital from Rome to the new city of Constantinople in 330 CE, and the western part of the empire began its final decline. During this last period, Roman art became less realistic as Classical forms and styles were abandoned in favor of simpler, more massive effects. Finally, Rome was shaken by barbarian assaults, and the last western emperor was forced to abdicate in 476 CE.

EXERCISES

1. What are the chief features of Etruscan culture and religion?
2. What light do these features cast on the problem of the Etruscans’ origins?
3. “Roman art and culture are late and debased forms of Hellenistic art.” Discuss this statement.
4. In what ways does the Aeneid fulfill its aim to provide the Romans with a national epic?
5. Compare the Aeneid in this respect to the Greek epics, the Iliad and Odyssey, discussed in Chapter 2.
6. Describe in detail Augustus’s use of the visual arts as instruments of propaganda. Are there comparable examples of the arts used for political purposes in recent times?
7. What do the discoveries at Rome and Pompeii tell us about daily life in the Roman Empire? In what significant respects did it differ from life today?