Chapter 5

The Roman Revolution

Just at the moment that the Romans had eliminated all threats to themselves in the Mediterranean, their own social, cultural, and political system began to disintegrate. Beginning in 133 B.C. with the murder of the tribune Tiberius Gracchus, Rome went through a century of civil and military turmoil. Modern historians have called the period the Roman Revolution. Perhaps the event is best explained generically as the painful—but interesting—transition of a city-state to a world-state. If this is an accurate description of the event, it is also a measure of the greatness of Rome that even in the midst of its disintegration it managed to find the necessary resources to make the successful passage from Republic to Empire. It might be said that the most significant aspect of this so-called revolution is that Rome survived its own transformation.

Modern and Ancient Versions of the Transformation

The Romans themselves were well aware of what was happening, if not its full dimensions. Of course that is true of any period in history. Nevertheless, the surviving accounts exhibit a rather narrow understanding of what went wrong. These sources speak mostly of moral decay among various segments of society which they saw beginning at different moments in the past. The politician, soldier, and historian Sallust, a supporter of Julius Caesar, looked back to the fall of Carthage in 146 B.C. as the moment the rot began (5.2). The historian of Augustus’ time, Livy, saw the collapse starting somewhat earlier—when the army of Manlius Vulso returned from Macedonia in 187 B.C. with an unRoman appetite for dancing girls, good food, and comfortable
living (5.6). Some blamed everything on the reforming activities of the brothers Gracchi, Tiberius, and Gaius. In any case, the end result was that Rome ceased, by 30 B.C., to be a free Republic, choosing its leaders on an annual basis by elections, and became a military autocracy ruled by the general who commanded the loyalty of the Roman army.

While the Roman writers saw the fall of the Republic in moral terms, modern historians see fundamental changes in Roman social, cultural, political, and

It was strange that while Rome in 200 B.C. had control of large overseas provinces such as Sicily and Spain, most of Italy remained in the hands of its native peoples. By and large they were not Roman citizens, but allies of Rome, socii. Romans were mostly confined to a stretch of territory reaching from coast to coast in central Italy, and in scattered colonies elsewhere on the peninsula. One of Rome's greatest challenges during the Roman Revolution was the integration of these peoples within the Roman commonwealth. Had Rome failed in this enterprise there would have been no Roman Empire. The process was slow, but by the end of the Revolution (around 30 B.C.), task had been accomplished and a new ruling class made up of Roman and Italian elites provided the basis for the government of the Roman Empire.
economic life, beginning with the Hannibalic War (218–202 B.C.). In their eyes, these changes were so fundamental that the old system was doomed. The result, however, was something less than a thoroughgoing transformation of all aspects of Roman life. Perhaps for that reason, the term “Revolution,” although commonly used, is not altogether appropriate. Essential aspects of Roman society such as economic relations, social hierarchy, personal patronage, traditional gender relations, and so on were not greatly altered—at least not in the long run. What did change was the constitution and the way Romans governed themselves or, as some of them thought, ceased to govern themselves, for in the end, political freedom was abandoned in exchange for personal security and the security of property.

Economic Changes

One of the results of the conquest of the Mediterranean was the flow of booty into Italy in the form of looted works of art, cash, and slaves that followed the return of Rome’s victorious armies. This booty was followed by war indemnities and, more importantly, permanent revenue streams in the form of annual tribute. It is not always clear, however, that these taxes paid for the cost of administering the empire. Some parts of the empire were less cost-effective than others. Although most of the money coming into Rome stayed at the top, some trickled down to the masses in various forms, such as improved services and communications, a share in war booty for soldiers, and, most important, the elimination in 167 B.C. of the tributum, the principal tax to which Romans were subject. Eventually, the people of the city of Rome acquired entitlements to subsidized grain or, later, bread—the “bread and the circus” entitlement (panem et circenses), sneered at by the satirist Juvenal.

In an underdeveloped economy with no industry and relatively little commerce, there were only a few places for the new wealth to go. Most went into the basic source of well-being in the ancient world, land. Much of it found its way into public building programs and items of conspicuous consumption in the private realm such as spectacular town houses and villas. Throughout Italy in the second century B.C., a great network of trunk roads was constructed, linking one end of the country with the other and tying distant colonies directly to Rome. New colonies were established in strategic locations, and on occasion, individual grants (virritim) of public land were made to attract migrant peasants from the over-crowded parts of central Italy. The slow process of clearing the forests and draining the swamps of the Po valley was begun, making this immensely fertile region available for cultivation.

Under these influences, the character of Italian agriculture began to change. The peasant subsistence farmer, the backbone of the army, began to give way to the long-term volunteer, whose loyalty was more likely to be to his commander—or at any rate to the person who could pay his wages—than to the state (5.5). New
Republic in the Mediterranean. Disaffected members of the elite such as the Gracchi made use of the popular assemblies to advance their own goals independent of the wishes of the Senate and the elite at large (5.3). They began to act in a "popular manner," hence the term popularis to describe this kind of politician. Eventually, the split became deadly when ambitious dynasts ("power wielders") like Caesar appealed directly to the people over the heads of the elite and the Senate. Working in tandem with popular leaders in Rome, dynasts of this type overtaxed the finely balanced, and now badly weakened, system of government at Rome.

Cultural Transformation

In the second century B.C., in addition to other problems brought on by its military successes, Rome had to face and cope with the encroachment of a powerful higher culture, that of Greece. In some respects this challenge of Hellenization was the most powerful of the many challenges Rome had to face during the period of the Roman Revolution.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that Romans were culturally illiterate in the fields of poetry, drama, and history before the second century B.C., although some efforts were being made in the direction of the first two at this time, chiefly by outsiders. Philosophically or scientifically, Rome never challenged Greek supremacy (5.7). In art and architecture, Romans were not quite so backward but still had a long way to go for a people who now claimed to be, and were in actuality, the rulers of the Mediterranean. It took time for the cultural revolution to take hold. Latin was still too rough in the third century B.C. for prose writing and was only slowly being made suitable for poetry and drama. Yet it was at precisely this time that Rome had the greatest need to communicate with the rest of the world and explain its institutions and politics to the educated classes of the Mediterranean. Public opinion was important in the Greek-speaking world, and it was essential for the Romans to respond to questions being raised throughout the Mediterranean about where Rome had sprung from; what enabled it to conquer Pyrrhus, the Gauls, and the Carthaginians (the last two ancient enemies of the Greeks); and, especially, what justification, if any, it had for possessing an empire.

The first answers to such questions were supplied by Greeks writing about Rome from a distance, such as Timaeus of Tauromenium in Sicily, who lived in Athens in the early third century B.C. Not until the end of the Second Punic War were Romans able to give an account of their institutions and history. Writing in Greek, Fabius Pictor wrote a history of Rome that emphasized its strength, moderation, tenaciousness, and good faith as well as the wisdom of its Senate and its strict moral code. With Cato the Elder, in the first half of the second century B.C., Latin history writing first came into existence, representing a new level of self-confidence on the part of the Romans, who now rose to the challenge of Greek letters by composing a literature in their own language. This was an achievement matched by no other people with whom the Greeks came into contact. For Cato,
in fact, the Greeks no longer counted; the Romans and the Italians had nothing of which to be ashamed. On the contrary, he believed that they had incorporated the best of the Greek world with the best of their own rich heritage—a pardonable exaggeration with which many Greeks in the second century B.C. must have agreed. From this time on, numerous accounts in Latin by members of the senatorial class provided the growing reading public of Rome and Italy with suitably patriotic, moralizing histories, often laced with polemic tracts from the internal political battles of the century. There were few qualms about adapting history to the political needs of the Roman upper classes, and history was seen as a means of glorifying one’s achievements and the achievements of one’s family, as well as propagandizing for further advancement.

In Cato’s younger days, Roman poetry and drama were rudimentary, with Livius Andronicus and Naevius providing translations of Greek poems and plays, but the first half of the second century B.C. saw the full flowering of Latin in the works of Ennius, Pacuvius, Plautus, Terence, and others. Epic poems glorifying Rome’s past and its destiny were produced, and Ennius’ aphonisms, which reflected the nobles’ vision of Rome, became commonplaces quoted throughout subsequent Roman history. Plays celebrating Roman historical events were written but never became popular. Comedies, especially those of Plautus, were always popular, although the settings and the stock figures were Greek for fear of offending conservative Roman tastes. There was no place for Aristophanic humor in Rome, where the aristocracy took its role as a governing class seriously and unquestioningly. Mime and farce, which were native to Italy, were the popular fare of the lower classes and eventually displaced the plays of Roman comedy altogether.

**Religious Innovations**

Roman religion showed the effects of the upheavals brought about by the acquisition of an empire. Traditionally, Roman religion had been an integral part of state affairs. Of course, there was a private religion or devotion practiced within families and by individuals, but the state was involved with religion as part of its proper function. Political figures held religious offices as a matter of course, and the maintenance of the peace of the gods (*pax deorum*) was as much a part of the functioning of the state as fighting wars or hearing legal cases—the other two primary duties of Roman magistrates, who had inherited the triple roles of priest, general, and judge from the Etruscan kings. However, after the expansion of Rome, the old system was clearly inadequate, and the very localized character of the religion made it impossible to export. Religious functions were to be performed in Rome, and various figures who were priests as well as consuls or praetors were hindered in the performance of their duties and in some instances could not leave Italy at all. As Rome grew and the bonds of clientship (*clientela*) dissolved, the confinement of religion to the higher officials of state and to state functions created a vacuum. Eastern religions moved in to fill the void. The worship of the Great Mother
had Fabius censured for making the administration of the province intolerably burdensome to the inhabitants. This brought Gaius a great reputation in addition to making him popular in the provinces.

He also introduced legislation for the founding of colonies and the building of roads and public granaries. Although he himself undertook the management and direction of all these projects, he showed no signs of being worn down by these different and demanding tasks. On the contrary, he carried each one out with amazing speed and application as if it were the only one he was doing. Even those who hated and feared him were struck by his efficiency and his ability to get things done. As for the people, they were thrilled to see him surrounded by a mob of contractors, craftsmen, ambassadors, magistrates, soldiers, and scholars. He was on familiar terms with all of these. Yet, while showing kindness and the kind of consideration that was due to each, he was able to preserve his dignity. In this way he was able to demonstrate that those who cast him as intimidating, overbearing, or violent were envious detractors.

His greatest enthusiasm was reserved for the building of roads. These he made beautiful and graceful as well as useful. Made of quarried stone and tamped sand, they were laid out straight across the countryside. Depressions were filled in, and watercourses or ravines were bridged. Both sides of the road were leveled or raised to the same height, so that the whole project had everywhere an even and attractive appearance.

Unfortunately for Gracchus, the office of tribune was a weak base on which to try to carry out such an ambitious, independent program. The Senate outbid him in crowd-pleasing legislation and was able to undermine his support. When he ran for a third term as tribune, he was defeated. Then, when the Senate proceeded to take apart his legislative program, Gaius' followers were provoked into a confrontation. In the riot that ensued, violence resulted and the oligarchs in the Senate had the excuse to declare an emergency. Gaius and his followers were slaughtered and their property confiscated. To crown their triumph and rub salt in the wounds, the temple of Concord, which had been built centuries earlier as a monument to the establishment of understanding between plebeians and patricians, was refurbished by Opimius, one of the prime instigators of the emergency decree.

5.4 Politicians and Generals Out of Control

In 88 B.C., L. Cornelius Sulla was sent out as commander against the king of Pontus, Mithridates VI, whose generals had invaded the Roman provinces of Asia Minor and the mainland of Greece. One of the events of the campaign was the siege of Athens. Plutarch, after narrating the barbarous cutting down of the groves of the Academy and Lyceum gymnasia (the locations of Plato's and Aristotle's schools) for lumber for the siege, and detailing Sulla's demands for money, contrasts the behavior of the generals of the past with those of the present. It was precisely the transformation of the generals of Rome from servants of the state to independent dynasts that illustrates the distance between the late Republic and the earlier Republic. In a trenchant comment he says: "In order to become the masters of those better than
themselves they made themselves the slaves of the worst.” This is an apt description of how the dynasts—and their opponents—of the Late Republic often behaved.4

Since he [Sulla] needed a great deal of money for the war, he helped himself to the treasures in the sanctuaries of Greece, taking some from Epidaurus and some from Olympia, sending for the most beautiful and valuable objects deposited there. He also wrote to the guardians of Delphi saying that it was better to send the possessions of the god to him: either he would protect them more safely, or, if he used them, he would give back as much... 

Accordingly, the treasures were shipped out; most of the Greeks did not know about this. But the great silver wine cask, the last of the royal gifts [of Croesus, king of Lydia], was too large and heavy for transportation, and the guardians of Delphi were forced to cut it into pieces. As they did so, they recalled first Titus Flamininus, then Manius Acilius and Aemilius Paulus. Manius had driven Antiochus [King of Syria] out of Greece, and the others had conquered the Macedonian kings. Not only did these men leave untouched the sanctuaries of Greece but they even made gifts to them and honored them and increased the general veneration felt for them.

These were lawful commanders, they reflected, of well-disciplined men who had learned to serve their leaders without question. The consuls themselves were men of kingly souls and simple in their personal expenses, keeping their costs within the fixed allowances of the state. They thought it more shameful to seek popularity with their men than to fear the enemy. But now the Roman commanders rose to the top by force, not worth, and because they needed armies to fight each other rather than enemies of the state, they were forced to be both demagogues and generals. In order to pay for the gratifications with which they purchased the loyalty of their soldiers, before they knew it, they had sold off the fatherland itself.

Thus, in order to become the masters of those better than themselves they made themselves the slaves of the worst. These kinds of activities drove Marius into exile and again brought him back against Sulla; these made Cinna the murderer of Octavius and Fimbria of Flaccus. And not least, Sulla led the way. For to corrupt and win over those under the command of others, he made lavish expenditures on his own soldiers. As a result of making traitors of the soldiers of other generals and profligates of his own soldiers, he had need for a great deal of money, especially for this siege.

The breakdown of the old system of senatorial control was complete by 60 B.C. Although Roman politics was always characterized by political factions and deal-making, nothing was quite so brazen (at least to that point in time) as the so-called “First Triumvirate” of Pompey, Crassus, and Caesar. The complaints of Cato (the Younger) about the use of women for political purposes do not mean that marriage was not used for this end in the past but merely that it had become part of a larger process of “new politics” in which the traditional restraints were gone.5

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4Plutarch, Sulla 12.
5Plutarch, Caesar 14.
winter as an excuse they sat idle in Gordyene, every minute expecting Pompey or some other general to succeed Lucullus.

After more mutinous behavior on the part of his troops, Lucullus was forced to sit by and watch Tigranes plunder at will and Mithridates resume power. As an added extra to his embarrassment, the commission that had been sent out from Rome to organize the supposedly pacified province of Pontus arrived and discovered that Lucullus was not even in control of his own camp, let alone the territory of Mithridates. Finally, Pompey came to take command and Lucullus went home (66 B.C.). This was not the end of the story. The optimates, the traditionalists, were outraged. Pompey, they thought, had won his command by his flattery of the people and its leaders. It was a bad precedent. Neither the mutinous soldiers, the colluding officers in the field, nor the intriguing factional heads in Rome were punished or even shamed. The episode was yet another of the many nails being hammered in the coffin of the Roman Republic.

5.6 Social and Cultural Changes:
“The Beginnings of Foreign Luxury”

By the time Livy set about writing his story of the rise and decline of the Roman Republic, he had plenty of evidence of what looked like moral decay all around him to explain the decline. How much of this was real moral decay and how much was just an aspect of the change from city-state to world-state is a complicated issue. An additional factor that needs to be emphasized is that Livy was the heir to a long literary tradition of viewing the present in terms of the failure of contemporaries to live up to the glories of their virtuous ancestors. However, if we set aside Livy’s complaints about the awful present, we can see some of the changes that really did take place—for instance, the introduction, along with new wealth, of a generally higher standard of living than the puritanical past of the “ancestors” allowed.

The following is a particularly good example of Livy’s taking shots at the present in the guise of analysis of the past. Manlius Vulso returned to Rome in 187 B.C. to celebrate his triumph over the Gauls of Anatolia. His enemies spread the rumor that he had relaxed the old-fashioned discipline of Roman commanders and let his troops run riot in his province. Livy uses the opportunity to preach a little sermon.7

The origins of foreign luxury were brought to Rome by the returning army [of Manlius]. They were the first to introduce into Rome bronze couches, expensive rugs as covers, curtains, and other elaborate woven fabrics, and—what then were thought to be exotic pieces of furniture—tables with a single leg and marble-topped sideboards. To banquets were added women lute and harp players and other pleasures of the feast. The banquets themselves began to be prepared with greater care and

7Livy 39.6.
expenditure. Then the cook, for our ancestors the lowest of slaves in terms of both actual worth and use, began to have real value. What had been regarded as a mere labor now became an art! Yet these things, which at the time were thought to be remarkable, were merely the seeds of the luxury to come.

5.7 “He Mocked All Greek Culture and Learning”

Prolonged contact with the Hellenistic world made the Romans conscious of their cultural backwardness. They also discovered that there were life-styles other than the rather narrow one that all Romans had been forced to accept to that time. One of the key aspects of the Roman Revolution was the rapid and self-assured response of the Roman elites to the challenge of Greek culture, though, understandably, the guardians of traditional values at Rome regarded this response as evidence of moral decadence.

From approximately 200 B.C. onward, Romans began first to dabble in, and then become serious practitioners of, many, though not all, aspects of Greek high culture. In due course the Romans would have attractive private alternatives to service to the state, something the shrewd Cato anticipated when an embassy came to Rome in 153 B.C. from Athens to plead against a judicial decision and stayed to “infect” the youth of the city.\(^8\)

Cato was already an old man when a delegation came from Athens to Rome. Carneades the Academic philosopher and Diogenes the Stoic came to beg that the people of Athens be released from a fine of 500 talents that had been imposed on them. The Oropians had brought suit, the Athenians failed to appear, and the Sicyonians had judged against them.

As soon as the philosophers arrived the most intellectual among the younger Romans rushed to see them and listened to them with pleasure and wonder. Most of all they were impressed by the grace and power of Carneades’ oratory whose performance did not fall short of his reputation. His speeches attracted a large and sympathetic audience, and the city was filled with his praises as if by a great, roaring wind. The word spread all over that a Greek of astonishing ability had come who could overwhelm all opposition by his eloquence. He had so entranced the youth of the city that they had abandoned their pleasures and pursuits and had become enthused with philosophy. The majority were pleased with this and were glad to see their youth involved with Greek culture and associating with such distinguished men. But Cato, when passion for words first manifested itself in the city, was much upset, fearing that the younger generation’s ambition would be deflected to the glory of mere words rather than military exploits.

\(^8\)Plutarch, Cato 22–23.
Accordingly, when the reputation of the philosophers continued to increase in the city, and no less prominent a man than Gaius Acilius volunteered to act as their interpreter for their first meeting with the Senate, Cato determined to find some plausible excuse to clear all the philosophers out of the city. So, he came to the Senate and proceeded to blame the current magistrates for keeping the embassy in such long suspense although they were men whose powers of persuasion were so great that they could obtain anything they wanted. "We ought," he said, "to decide one way or the other on this issue and to vote on what the embassy proposes so that these distinguished men may return to their own schools and lecture the youth of Greece while the young men of Rome may, as in the past, pay attention to their own laws and magistrates."

He did this not as some think because of personal hostility to Carneades but because he was entirely opposed to philosophy and mocked all Greek culture and learning out of patriotism. . . . In order to discredit Greek culture in the eyes of his son, he spoke too loosely for his years, predicting that the Romans would be destroyed when they became infected by Greek learning. But time has shown how empty this prophecy was, for while the city was at the height of its powers, it embraced every form of Greek learning and culture.

5.8 In Defense of Public Service

A century later, Cato's presentiments had become reality. By the first century B.C., the Roman upper class discovered pleasures—and ideals—other than service to the state. In 56 B.C., Cicero felt the need to defend the old system in his tract, On the Commonwealth (De Re Publica) and to attack those who proposed the ideal of leisure as an alternative way of life, as it was found in some Greek philosophical systems. Although Cicero cannot avoid giving himself a pat on the back for his service to the state (see especially the closing paragraph), there is a great deal of truth in his eulogy of the old Republican ideal.9

It is not enough to possess virtue as if it were an art of some kind; it must also be applied in real life. While it is true that an art, even if never used, can still be retained in the form of knowledge, virtue, on the other hand, depends entirely on use. And its highest use is in the government of the state and the actual performance in deeds, not words, of those principles with which the philosophers make their ivory towers resound.

No principles worked out by philosophers . . . have not also been discovered and put into practice by those who draw up law codes for states. What is the source of our sense of moral obligation and our duty to the gods? What is the source of the law of nations or our own civil code? Whence justice, dependability, fair dealing? From where comes our sense of shame, self-restraint, fear of disgrace, desire for praise, and honor? Whence courage in the face of toil and

9Cicero, De Re Publica 1.2.
Those who belonged to the honestiores included first of all senators and equestrians, then decurions (local senators), soldiers, veterans, and some professionals. The scramble for citizenship became a scramble for inclusion in one of the higher classifications. Such inclusion was one of the ways the Romans could ensure their continuing interest in local administration and the army because service in either brought membership in the higher caste. This was not quite as discriminatory as it seems because those who scrambled hardest also needed the higher status the most. These were the property owners of moderate holdings whose material goods made them targets for exploitation by tax collectors, soldiers, and imperial administrators. The lower classes, as always, had little to protect them beyond public opinion, their membership in some organization patronized by the powerful, such as burial societies, or direct dependence on some powerful individual. Toward the end of this period, even this system of privilege failed to protect the middle class property owners from the exactions of the tax collectors, and there was a great deal of pressure either to move up to such a high status, either equestrian or senatorial, as to be out of reach, or to stop such attempts altogether and become the client of someone powerful enough to offer adequate protection.

7.1 “Nations by the Thousands . . . Serve the Masters of the Entire World”: What Held the Roman Empire Together

One of the most comprehensive overviews of the geographical extent of the Roman Empire and its military power appears in the form of a speech the Jewish historian Josephus attributes to King Herod Agrippa, who was trying to restrain Josephus’ countrymen from revolting. Judaea had suffered at the hands of some particularly poor Roman governors, the last of whom, Gessius Florus, was one of the worst. The country boiled with plots for rebellion. Although Herod does the speaking, the substance of the speech probably reflects the speech Josephus himself gave at the beginning of the war when he found himself in similar circumstances and had to try to dissuade the countrymen of his district from rebelling.

The speech reveals the kind of knowledge of the Romans a provincial upper-class individual such as Josephus possessed at the time of the Jewish Revolt (A.D. 66–70). It also reveals the kinds of predicaments people in the provincial upper classes could find themselves in vis-à-vis their hotheaded countrymen. Josephus rather readily went over to the Romans and, as a result, was hated by his countrymen who joined the revolt.

He begins by reminding his hearers that their forebears, although much better organized, had not resisted the Romans effectively in their first encounter with them in 63 B.C. While Josephus/Herod’s knowledge of geography and the battle order of the Roman army is
impressive, it is hard to believe that people set on revolt would be impressed by this kind of academic approach.¹

"Your ancestors . . . , the Athenians . . . , the Spartans . . . , the Macedonians—nations by the thousands, who had greater passion for liberty than you, have yielded. Will you alone refuse to serve the masters of the entire world? What troops, what weapons do you rely on? Where is your fleet to sweep the Roman seas? Where are the financial resources for your revolt? You must think you are going to war with Egyptians or Arabs! Are you blind to the magnitude and extent of Roman power? Why do you refuse to weigh your own weakness? Our forces have often been defeated even by our neighbors, while theirs are undefeated throughout the world! Indeed, they want even more. They are not content with the Euphrates as a frontier in the east, the Danube in the north, Libya and the desert beyond to the south, and Cadiz on the west. They have sought a new world beyond the Ocean and fought the previously unknown Britons!

"Face up to it! You are not richer than the Gauls, stronger than the Germans, smarter than the Greeks, more numerous than the people of the inhabited world. What gives you the confidence to tackle the Romans? 'It is cruel to be enslaved,' someone will say. How much more so for the Greeks, who are the most talented of peoples and occupy such a vast territory. Yet they must obey the six fasces [the bundle of rods symbolizing authority] of a Roman magistrare! A similar number control the Macedonians, who, more justly than you, are due their liberty. What of the five hundred cities of Asia? Without a garrison they prostrate themselves before a single governor and his consular fasces. Is it necessary to speak of the peoples around the Bosporus, Black Sea, the Sea of Azov . . . ? Previously these peoples did not recognize a ruler even from among themselves, but now they are subject to three thousand legionaries. Forty war ships keep the peace in that formerly unnavigable, dangerous sea. What powerful claims to freedom might be made by the peoples of Anatolia; yet they pay what they owe without the compulsion of arms.

"Then there are the Thracians, a people spread over a country [Bulgaria and part of Greece] five days' march in width and seven in length. Their land is more rugged and much more easily defended than yours. Its icy cold repels invaders, but do they not obey two thousand Roman guards? Their neighbors the Illyrians, who live in the land stretching from Dalmatia to the Danube frontier [i.e., Yugoslavia], yield to two legions and even cooperate with the Romans to repel the raids of the Dacians [from Romania]. . . .

"But if any nation might be excited to revolt by its natural advantages it is surely the Gauls. Nature provides them with the ramparts of the Alps to the east, the River Rhine in the north, the Pyrenees mountains in the south, and the Ocean in the west. Although surrounded by these defenses, with a population of three hundred and five tribes, and prosperity welling as it were from the land and flooding the rest of the

¹Josephus, Jewish Wars 2. 358–388.
world with its products, they nevertheless allow themselves to be treated by the Romans as a source of taxes. They have their own good fortune served back to them by their conquerors. And they accept this, not because of weakness of will or meanness of spirit: they fought for their freedom for eighty years. But they are overawed by the power of the Romans and their good fortune which wins them more victories than their arms. That is why the Gauls are enslaved to twelve hundred soldiers—hardly more than the number of their cities!

“As for Spain—neither the gold from its mines nor the vast stretch of land and sea which separates it from the Romans were sufficient to protect it in its struggle for freedom. Nor for that matter did the Lusitanian and Cantabrian tribes with their passion for war, nor the neighboring Ocean, whose tides terrify even the native, make any difference; the Romans, advancing beyond the Pillars of Hercules and traversing the cloud-capped Pyrenees, enslaved all these peoples. The guard for this remote nation of hard fighters is a single legion!

“Who among you has not heard of the populous German nation? You have seen their huge and powerful figures on many occasions since everywhere the Romans have them as their captives. This people occupies a vast territory. Their spirit surpasses the size of their bodies and disdains death. Enraged they are fiercer than wild beasts. Yet the Rhine stops their expansion. Tamed by eight Roman legions, those captured are enslaved and the whole nation seeks safety in flight.

“You who put your trust in the walls of Jerusalem consider what a wall the Britons had! The Ocean surrounds them; they live in an island as big as our whole Mediterranean world. Yet the Romans crossed the Ocean and enslaved them. Four legions now secure that vast land. But why say any more when the Parthians, the most warlike of peoples, rulers of so many nations and secure by the possession of such great power, send hostages to the Romans? Under the pretext of seeking peace, the elite of the East may be seen in Italy bowing in submission.

“When almost every nation under the sun prostrate themselves before the arms of Rome will you alone make war against them? Consider the fate of the Carthaginians, who boasted of the great Hannibal and the nobility of their Phoenician origins. They fell to the hand of Scipio. . . . This third part of the whole inhabited world [i.e., North Africa], whose peoples are hard to enumerate, bounded by the Atlantic Ocean and the Pillars of Hercules and stretching to the Indian Ocean, supporting as it does the countless Ethiopians—they have it all under their thumb. Besides their annual harvest, which feeds the Roman people for eight months, these peoples over and above pay tribute of all kinds. Unlike you, who see outrage in the demands of Rome, they readily contribute to the needs of the Empire, although only a single legion is garrisoned among them.

“Why look so far afield to demonstrate the power of Rome when we can find it in Egypt, our closest neighbor? Egypt stretches as far as Ethiopia and Arabia Felix and is the point of departure for India. It has a population of seven and a half million, not counting the inhabitants of Alexandria. This is shown by the individual tax returns. Yet this country does not spurn the rule of Rome. What an incentive to revolt it has in Alexandria, with its huge population, its great wealth and size! . . . The tribute
Egypt sends to Rome exceeds in one month what you send in a year! The land is protected by impassable deserts, seas without harbors, rivers, and swamps. Yet none of these assets were sufficient to resist the Fortune of Rome. Two legions stationed in Alexandria curb the remotest parts of Egypt and the proud Macedonian elite to boot. "What allies do you hope for in the coming war? You must expect them from the uninhabited wilds, for the inhabited world is all Roman. . . ."

7.2 "They Make a Desert and Call It Peace": A View of Rome from the Provinces

Britain was added to the Empire in the first century A.D. One of the principal architects of the conquest was Agricola, the father-in-law of the great senatorial historian Tacitus. The following reading is found in a eulogy composed by Tacitus in honor of Agricola's accomplishments. The speech is attributed to the Caledonian (Scottish) chieftain Calgacus, who is trying to rally his troops against the Romans. The sentiments are conventional Greco-Roman projection—that is, they express what they thought would or should be the appropriate sentiments of barbarians. Tacitus' intent was not so much to provide historical insight into the mind of a Scots chieftain egging on his reluctant followers to fight as it was to berate contemporary Romans for their lack of spirit. Although they thought of themselves as masters of the world, Romans, Tacitus is saying, were in reality the slaves of the emperors.

The picture be paints of the Empire is a bleak one. While it is undoubtedly true that a percentage of Rome's subjects would have shared these sentiments, the opinion that states were nothing but organized robberies was an old one. This speech should not be interpreted as though it were based on a poll of Rome's subjects. Calgacus despairingly suggests that there is some hope in the heterogeneous ethnicity of the Roman army.  

"Whenever I review the causes of this war and our present desperate situation, I have great confidence that today our united efforts will be the beginning of Britain's liberty. The reason is that all of us are united. We are free of the effects of enslavement. There is no other land beyond us. Indeed, not even the sea is secure, for Rome's fleet threatens us from that quarter. Thus battle and arms will offer for the brave the most glory, and for the coward the greatest safety.

"Previous battles against the Romans, although fought with varying outcome, have left us the hope of success. We, the best people in Britain, living in the country's inner recesses and never having any contact with the conquered, have, as a result, preserved ourselves unpolluted from the contagion of enslavement. Here at the world's end, we, the last unenslaved people, have preserved our liberty to this day because of our remoteness and our obscurity. Now, however, the farthest parts of Britain lie open and all the unknown is wondered at. But there are no peoples beyond us, nothing but

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"Tacitus, Agricola 30."