else, the establishment of the Roman provinces and alliances brought comparative peace and unity to the whole Mediterranean and Middle Eastern region for nearly five hundred years.

The Romans did fight foreign wars in this period, but usually their conflicts were fought to protect or consolidate the borders of Roman provinces. There were few instances of Roman aggression or imperialism, certainly not in the second century B.C. But even the acquisition of its provinces, annexed as part of Rome's defensive strategy, made people like Cato anxious. The more provinces Rome had, he argued, the more magistrates it needed to govern them; the more magistrates it had, the less exclusive the Senate would be, and the more Rome's moral authority would be diluted and weakened.

Chapter Seven

NEW DIRECTIONS FOR ROME

Rome's finest hour had ended with the Second Punic War. With their later involvement in the East and the establishment of new provinces, the Romans were never again as innocent, as morally high-minded. New elements came crowding onto Roman life, and though they may not have seemed important at the time, these developments soon would effect the direction of Roman society as a whole.

IMPERIUM

Cato perhaps had been wrong to provoke the destruction of Carthage, but he was not a fool. He was right to worry about the dangers of trying to use the institutions and practices originally developed for a small, homogeneous city to manage an empire that now extended throughout the Mediterranean. The increasing need to extend the *imperium* of magistrates, whether to govern provinces or to command armies on lengthy campaigns, had led the Senate to abandon an old rule that had prevented any official from being reelected until he had been out of office for ten years. During the Second Punic War, for instance, Quintus Fabius Maximus had been elected consul three years in a row, and Scipio Africanus had been either consul or proconsul for ten successive years.

By 195 B.C., the Senate had carefully worked out a set of rules called the *cursus honorum*: magistrates were to work their way up a

ladder of successive offices, from quaestor to consul, with a minimum age fixed for holding each office. The Senate reasoned that to give a magistrate too much power, or to give it to him too soon, would encourage personal ambition rather than loyalty to the interests of the state. However, the Senate never succeeded in enforcing its rules regarding the *cursus honorum*, or for that matter any other checks on individual misuse of the *imperium*. It was one of the failures that, over the next hundred and fifty years, weakened and then led to the disintegration of the republic.

THE EQUITES

In the Roman army, the cavalry originally had been expected to provide their own horses, and to feed and stable them on campaigns. Horses were expensive, and their owners presumably had to be rich. As a result, the name *equites* (knights, horsemen) now became attached to a new class of prosperous men who were not in the Senate but had made money in business rather than from land.

The equites had first made their mark during the Second Punic War as members of private companies hired to transport supplies and equipment to Roman troops abroad. After the war they became involved in commercial ventures, in banking, in mining enterprises in Spain and Macedonia, and in foreign trade. They also collected—for a hefty fee—the rents from those who farmed the *ager publicus* (the land belonging to the state, which had been conquered many years before during the Latin and Etruscan wars). The equites were not as yet much involved in politics, and since they were not nobles, it would have been contrary to tradition for them to be elected to office. But they now were well off, even very well off, and they became extremely influential. Clearly, they would soon be ready to receive significant formal powers as well.

FAMILY LIFE

From 264 B.C. to 146 B.C. the Roman armies had been in action more or less constantly, especially since Hannibal's invasion, when the pace of recruiting had risen sharply. Many Roman men had been absent from home for five, ten, even fifteen years. Some had been conscripted at the time of their lives when they would normally have been thinking about marrying and setting up their own households. Others had just started families, which had then been forced to manage without them. During and after the wars, there was a steep increase in celibacy and in divorce. Many young men, young no longer, had become used to unmarried life and did not particularly want to change their status; many older men found that their wives had grown away from them and their children did not know them.

Of course, many thousands of Romans had been killed in action—more than sixty thousand in the battles of Lake Trasimene and Cannae alone—or who had died on campaigns abroad. Often a family's entire male line had been wiped out. Ever since the publication of the Twelve Tables in 450 B.C., Roman women had been allowed to possess property. Now many of them had inherited land or money, and were not only enjoying a comfortable life of independence, but were making important financial decisions and managing large estates. Women began to appear in public more frequently, at religious ceremonies and at the games. The daughters of noble families were often given the same education as sons, and in Rome groups of women gathered for intellectual and political discussions (like the Parisian salons in the late nineteenth century). But this new freedom for women did not afford them a more active political role, except as movers and shakers, behind the scenes.

SLAVES

As was true of most wars in the ancient world, Rome's conquests had resulted in large numbers of prisoners who were forced to become slaves. Though a body of law existed that was designed to look after the slaves' interests, Romans never questioned the institution of slavery itself. To them, as to the Greeks, slavery was an accepted, natural part of life. It did not become an issue for moral philosophers or social reformers until the arrival of Christianity, some two hundred years later.

Roman slaves fell into two categories: domestic slaves, and field hands who worked on the farms, especially on the large country estates called *latifundia*. The latter were very badly treated by any standard, because they were expendable and their labor was cheap. They were usually kept in chains, were miserably housed and fed, and worked under the whip. By contrast, private household slaves were by law counted as members of the family, and came under the authority of the *paterfamilias* just as did the children of the house. However, Roman families often became too dependent on their slaves. One of the most revered ideals of the Romans had been self-sufficiency; yet now they were waited on hand and foot by slaves, and they came to expect others to do everything for them. Thus, too many Romans became pampered and dependent.

Household slaves were paid a regular small wage (*peculium*) for their services, and many of them invested this money until they could buy their freedom. Alternatively, some were freed by their masters

after long years of service. These freedmen (*liberti*) did not become Roman citizens themselves, although their children automatically became full citizens, with the right to vote. Perhaps the most distinguished Roman whose ancestors had been slaves was the poet Horace; there undoubtedly were many others, but presumably they were too embarrassed to admit to their background.

GREEK INFLUENCE

One of Horace's most famous lines succinctly describes the cultural effects of the Romans' exposure to the morals and manners of the Greeks. *Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit* (captive Greece took its crass conqueror captive), he wrote. Horace had seen the influence of Greece spread inexorably into every corner of Roman life, sometimes resented but generally welcomed. This Greek influence had begun with the absorption of the Greek cities of southern Italy after the war with Pyrrhus in 280 B.C. It had quickened during Rome's campaigns in Illyria and Macedonia during the Second Punic War, and became stronger still after Greece came under the protection of Rome in 146 B.C.

Politics

The Senate traditionally had been committed to preserving its own oligarchy, but also—more generously and wisely—to leading all social classes toward a common good. Rome was dedicatedly conservative, and it seldom welcomed changes in its policies, customs, or ideas. Now from Greece came the same kind of talk that had shaped Athenian politics, talk about the freedoms of individual citizens: the freedom to argue, to debate, to question the *status quo*. And soon the impregnable stone wall of the Senate, which had sheltered the Roman people through so many critical moments, would begin to crumble before the exploratory chipping of both altruistic and ambitious individuals.

In addition to Greek individualism came Alexander the Great's vision of the world as a pattern of infinite variety within a unity built upon a common set of values. This meant that the deliberations of legal theorists henceforth would have to consider both the concept of *ius civile* (law pertaining to Roman citizens) and *ius gentium* (law pertaining to humanity as a whole, as a part of nature). Even military strategy became tinged with Greek morality: in a modification of Aristotle's theory of a "just war" (a war in which Greeks must be free, barbarians must be enslaved) the mission of the Romans toward other states would soon become, in Vergil's phrase, *parcere subiectis, debellare superbos* (to be merciful to the downtrodden, but to crush the arrogant).

All this new thought, together with a loudly expressed enthusiasm for Greek art and literature, was introduced by an energetic group of young Roman nobles, led by the young Scipio and known as the Scipionic Circle. Conservatives, especially in the Senate—and especially Cato—regarded the Circle with suspicion, fear, and even hatred. Scipio and his friends, said the Senators, were soft themselves, and they were making other people lax too. In fact, they were undermining the whole fabric of traditional Roman seriousness and solidarity.

Private Life

A large number of the new household slaves were captives from Greece, and they brought their own Greek influences to the Roman families they served. For example, a slave who was sophisticated and literate might become a tutor to the children of the house. The introduction of Greek tutors led to a much wider knowledge of the Greek language, which became the mark of a liberal education, and Latin gradually became sprinkled with Greek words. Greek also was often used as the language of diplomacy (Hannibal and Scipio may have conferred in Greek before the battle of Zama), and it eventually became the *lingua franca* of the eastern part of the Roman empire.

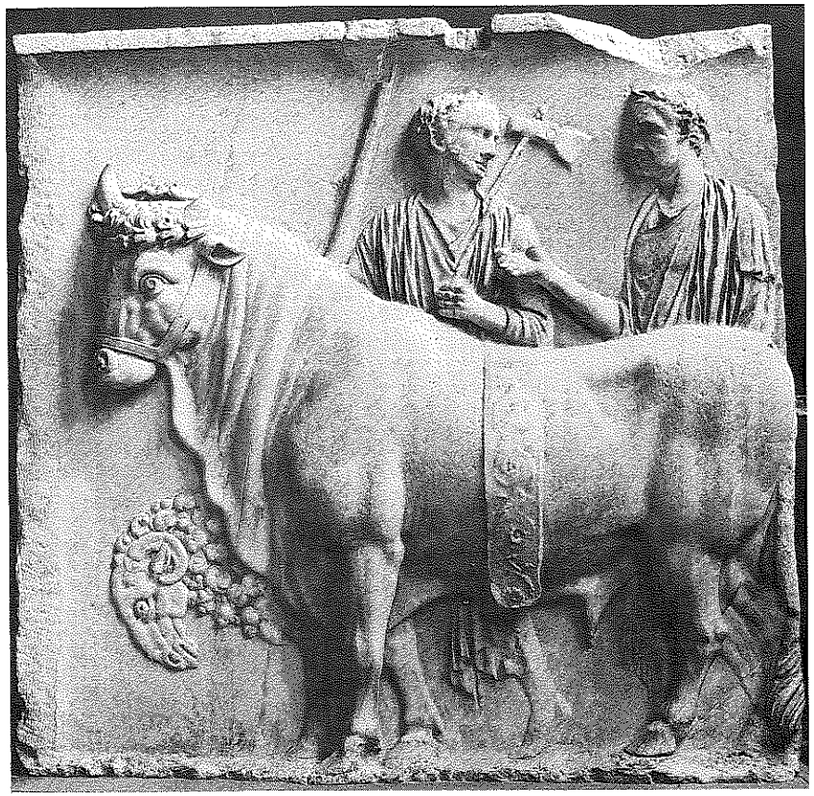
But however good the slave was at his job, the distancing of the father from the education of his children meant yet another diminution of old-fashioned Roman conservatism, and opened yet another conduit for the new political and cultural ideas. A more luxurious style of life, which had become fashionable among the Greeks, now began to take hold in Roman homes influenced by their Greek slaves—and this further encouraged Romans' increasing self-indulgence. The Senate reacted by proposing new laws limiting expenditures on clothes, jewelry, carriages—and even on slaves themselves—but their measures had no effect.

Literature

The earliest examples of Latin literature consist of little more than songs, official inscriptions, long instructional treatises (Cato wrote one on agriculture) and clumsy comedies, and only fragments of them survive. Now the new familiarity with Greek culture brought a flood of Greek writing into Italy. Schools (*ludi*) had recently come into fashion for the children of the rich, and the poems of Homer became the core of the curriculum, just as they had been in Athens, along with Greek history, drama, and philosophy. These works not only were popular in themselves, but they served as models for a new generation of more sophisticated Latin authors. The study of Greek oratory by Roman lawyers and politicians, moreover, greatly influenced styles of public speaking and forensic argument.

Plautus and Terence wrote plays in Latin based on the "new comedy" of Menander. The latter usually were tales of ingenious slaves

leading their masters through a trail of mistaken identities, new-found loves, and long-lost rich relatives. (The same plot later was copied many times: Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors,* for instance, and the 1950s Broadway musical *The Boys from Syracuse* come from the same play of Plautus, and all P. G. Wodehouse's Jeeves stories follow the "new comedy" format.) There were also Latin versions of Greek epics, and, later, a long exposition in hexameters of Epicurus' philosophy by Lucretius called *De Rerum Natura* (The Nature of the Universe). Despite his majestic poetry, Lucretius' proposal that a mechanical arrangement of atoms was the basis of nature, together with his rejection of conventional religion, seemed to many to undermine the traditional Roman reverence for the gods—and thus was another blow at the *mos maiorum.*



VII.1 Country life: a farmer hands over a bull and a ram for sacrifice to one of the country gods. (Art Resource)

VII.2 A workshop in the city: craftsmen preparing lengths of material to be made into clothing. (Art Resource)

SOCIAL UNREST IN ITALY

When the Punic Wars ended, the family was only one Roman institution left weakened. The demobilized soldiers, returning home, often found that their farms had failed through lack of proper attention, or that their land had been sold and absorbed into someone else's estate. The *latifundia* thus had grown even larger at the expense of Rome's traditional small farms. Since it was much more economical to use slave labor, no jobs on the *latifundia* were available for citizens, nor was any land left for them to rent. These displaced and dispossessed farmers soon drifted into the cities, where they again found a glut of cheap labor. Eventually the unemployed began to outnumber the craftsmen and shopkeepers who originally had made up the urban population. They formed a large, restless underclass, distracted by lavish gladiatorial shows and chariot races, who lived off free or government-subsidized wheat—much of it imported from the new province of Africa. By these methods the magistrates and the Senate hoped to buy their patience and their votes.

Such entertainments and subsidies were not available, however, to Rome's Italian allies, who had fought so long and so well. They had won no profits from the wars and no perks; they had no vote in Rome which they might use to alleviate their plight. Silently and softly they began to press for a change in their status, for full Roman citizenship.