

CHAPTER 11-MEDITERRANEAN SOCIETY: THE ROMAN PHASE

Although migrant peoples had occupied Italy since about 2000 B.C.E., the major influence came from the Etruscans who came into Italy in the 700s B.C.E.. They set up the center of their civilization in Rome on the Tiber River and their kings ruled Italy until 509 B.C.E. when the Roman nobility deposed the last Etruscan king. The Romans then established a republic with elected officials, including two consuls and a senate. As in Greece, there was conflict between the upper class (patricians) and the lower class (plebes) but this was resolved by granting plebes both representation and veto power in the Senate. Expanding in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E., the Romans became the dominant power in the Mediterranean.

As was the case with other large states, as Rome grew so did its problems. One of its major problems was the issue of land reform, or who got how much land. Two brothers, Gaius and Tiberius Gracchus, advocated for reform but both were assassinated in the second century B.C.E., ushering in a period of civil war.

In 49 B.C.E. we have the appearance of a well-known figure, Gaius Julius Caesar, who, before he became the first Roman emperor, was a respected soldier and important conqueror. Becoming a dictator, Caesar began major social reforms and centralized the Roman government. While his policies were popular with many Romans, there was a group of conservatives who objected to his changes and they assassinated him in 44 B.C.E. Caesar's nephew Octavian (later to be known as Augustus) eventually succeeded him and set the pattern for Roman government for the next 400 years. He created a new army, expanded the empire into Egypt and Western Europe, and started what became known as the *pax Romana*, or Roman peace.

During this period, Rome was center of both trade and politics around the Mediterranean. With products being created for export and the Roman navy keeping the seas safe, the empire became wealthy and this wealth helped to make Rome the most powerful city in Europe. Within this seemingly advanced society traditional problems still existed. The Roman family still centered on the oldest male as the head of the household. Women, while active in finances and business, still had no formal political power. There was also a wide gulf between the rich and poor without any reasonable policy to address it. Despite these problems, the Roman Empire was very cosmopolitan and religiously liberal, allowing its people to follow a number of different beliefs. The spread of these beliefs, which would later include Christianity, was helped in part by that iconic and historical development, Roman roads.

Key Concept 2.1. The Development and Codification of Religious and Cultural Traditions

- I. Codifications and further developments of existing religious traditions provided a bond among the people and an ethical code to live by.

- II. New belief systems and cultural traditions emerged and spread, often asserting universal truths.

Key Concept 2.2. The Development of States and Empires

- I. The number and size of imperial societies grew dramatically by imposing political unity on areas where previously there had been competing states.
- II. Empires and states developed new techniques of imperial administration based, in part, on the success of earlier political forms.
- IV. The Roman, Han, Maurya and Gupta empires created political, cultural and administrative difficulties that they could not manage, which eventually led to their decline, collapse and transformation into successor empires or states.

Key Concept 2.3. Emergence of Transregional Networks of Communication and Exchange

- III. Alongside the trade in goods, the exchange of people, technology, religious and cultural beliefs, food crops, domesticated animals, and disease pathogens developed across far-flung networks of communication and exchange.