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Augustus: Founder of the Roman Empire

Although the Romans conquered most of their territory during the days of the republic, the term "Roman Empire" is often used to refer to the period when emperors governed Rome (27 B.C.–A.D. 476). The first of these emperors was Augustus. Augustus administered the empire so mildly and so capably that he succeeded in reconciling the Roman people to imperial rule. It is no exaggeration to state that the order, peace, and prosperity Augustus restored to the empire, coming in the wake of three bloody civil wars, saved Greco-Roman civilization from extinction. On the other hand, Augustus's very success also paved the way for the despotism of Caligula, Nero, and other maniacal rulers.

THE THIRD ROMAN CIVIL WAR: ANTONY VERSUS OCTAVIAN (AUGUSTUS)

The Battle of Philippi

In 42 B.C., the two largest armies in Roman history faced each other. The army of the Second Triumvirate defeated the republican army of Brutus and Cassius in two battles at Philippi in Macedon. In the first battle, Brutus routed Antony's force, while Octavian's army (Octavian himself was too ill to be present) routed Cassius's force. Unaware of Brutus's success and thinking that all was lost, Cassius committed suicide. He fell on the same sword with which he had stabbed Caesar. Brutus called Cassius

"the last of the Romans." In this first battle, the triumvirate lost twice as many troops as their opponents (16,000 to 8,000).

But in the second battle, Cassius's soldiers, demoralized by the death of their fiery leader, were easily routed, thereby bringing defeat on Brutus's forces as well. When one of Brutus's aides implored him not to take his own life, pleading tearfully, "We must escape," the Stoic replied: "Yes, we must escape, but this time with our hands, not our feet." He ordered one of his servants to hold his sword while he plunged himself into it. His wife, Porcia, suffocated herself.

Like most of the Roman republican martyrs, Brutus was hardly the saint of legend. A greedy man, he had once ordered a representative to collect, by force if necessary, repayment of a loan from the people of Salamis in Cyprus. Brutus was charging the townsmen 48 percent interest, though the maximum interest rate allowed in the province was 12 percent.

But, whatever Brutus's faults, he was shrewd enough to predict that Octavian and Antony would soon be fighting each other. The Senate declared Julius Caesar a god, thereby granting added prestige to his adopted son Octavian, who had already curried favor with the Roman people by supervising the distribution of the funds Caesar had willed them.

Antony versus Octavian

The triumvirate ruled the Roman Empire as virtual dictators. In 40 B.C., they formally divided the empire between them. Octavian received the western empire, except for North Africa, which went to Lepidus, and Mark Antony received the eastern empire. At the same time, Antony married Octavian's sister Octavia to cement the alliance between them. Octavian evicted Lepidus from the triumvirate in 36 B.C., after Lepidus's attempt to seize Sicily from Octavian failed when most of his troops deserted to Octavian.

At first glance, it appeared that Antony held the upper hand against Octavian, since he controlled Egypt, Rome's most important province. But Octavian's control of Italy allowed him to impress the most important men of Rome with his administrative talents.

Antony then sealed his own fate by falling in love with Cleopatra. Though not particularly beautiful, Cleopatra was extremely intelligent, knowledgeable (having mastered numerous languages), and charming. The couple entertained themselves by going about Alexandria dressed as slaves and ridiculing people. (Since most citizens never imagined that this pair could be the rulers of Egypt, Antony was beaten several times.) The couple held lavish parties at which Cleopatra dressed as Isis and Antony as Bacchus.

When Antony dispatched formal letters of divorce to Octavia, who was a kind and virtuous woman much beloved by the Roman people, Octavian used the act as a pretext for waging war against Antony. He seized Antony's will from the Vestal Virgins and publicly revealed its contents. In the will, Antony made his sons by Cleopatra his heirs, even declaring that they would inherit Parthia, which had not been conquered. Romans were outraged at the eventual prospect of being ruled by men who were only half Roman. The people also discovered that Antony's will ceded control of three Roman territories to Cleopatra. Finally, the will declared that if Antony died in Rome, his body must be sent back to Cleopatra in Alexandria. Octavian cleverly used Roman xenophobia to attract broad support, claiming that Antony would transfer the capital of the empire to Alexandria. For propaganda purposes, Octavian declared war on Cleopatra, not Antony, claiming that Antony was acting under some sort of spell cast by this evil, eastern woman. Nevertheless, Octavian's brazen act of seizing a will from the Vestal Virgins antagonized some Romans; one-third of the senators and both consuls bet their lives on Antony.

The Battle of Actium

In 31 B.C., Octavian's navy, under the leadership of Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa—a brilliant admiral of low birth who had built and trained a fleet from scratch—destroyed or captured three-quarters of Antony's fleet at Actium in Greece. Although Octavian possessed only 400 ships to Antony's 500, Octavian's ships were more maneuverable and manned by better rowers. At a crucial point in the battle, Antony's center and left, perhaps alarmed by an enemy maneuver, began to retreat, forcing Antony to signal Cleopatra to escape with the war chest. Antony joined her squadron with forty ships of his own, leaving the remainder of his fleet to be destroyed or captured.

When Agrippa captured Antony's bases in the Peloponnesus, thereby severing the supply line to Antony's army in northern Greece, his 130,000 malaria-ridden soldiers, abandoned by their commander, surrendered. Octavian then cornered Antony in Egypt. When Antony heard a false rumor that Cleopatra had committed suicide, the fifty-three-year-old soldier stabbed himself through the stomach. Yet, he lived long enough to die in Cleopatra's arms.

The thirty-nine-year-old Cleopatra, the last of the Ptolemaic rulers of Egypt, committed suicide after Octavian captured her and the city of Alexandria in 30 B.C. According to Plutarch, Cleopatra chose to die from the bite of an asp, because the numerous experiments she had conducted on condemned prisoners convinced her that it was the least painful form of death. There may be some truth to this story, but it is also true that the

asp was the representative of the Egyptian sun god, and its effigy encircled the crown of Egypt to protect the royal line. Cleopatra may have chosen the asp to represent the sun god rescuing his daughter Isis from humiliation. In any case, the asp was smuggled to her under a basket of figs.

Octavian approved the completion of the mausoleum Antony and Cleopatra had begun and allowed their burial together in the same tomb. Octavia, ever virtuous, took it upon herself to raise the three children produced by her philandering husband and Cleopatra, as well as the children from Antony's previous marriage. But Octavian killed Caesarion, Cleopatra's young son by Julius Caesar, whose potential claim as Caesar's heir made him a dangerous rival.

Octavian then annexed Egypt and placed it under his personal control, the first such arrangement in Roman history. Mopping up operations against Antony's allies continued until 27 B.C. Octavian returned to Rome with so much gold that the interest rate immediately plunged from 12 to 4 percent.

After a full century of chaos and violence, in which the Roman republic had proved incapable of maintaining any semblance of peace or order, Rome was now thoroughly prepared for the rule of an emperor.

THE NEW ARRANGEMENTS

When Octavian returned to Rome in triumph after defeating Antony and Cleopatra, he declared before the Senate that the republic was restored. Of course, this was a charade. Everyone knew that Octavian wielded the supreme power and that it rested on his status as *imperator* (victorious general), commander of the army, whose soldiers took an oath of allegiance to him. Fearful of Octavian's power and, even more, of the continual civil wars that had nearly destroyed Rome, the Senate heaped awards, honors, and titles on him. The most famous of his titles was Augustus (Consecrated One), a title previously reserved for the gods. The month of Sextilis was changed to August to commemorate the month when Octavian had entered Alexandria, thereby ending the civil war. Another of his titles (after 2 B.C.) was *pater patriae* (Father of the Country). He called himself the *princeps civitatis* (First Citizen), a title that had been granted to elder statesmen during the republican period. For this reason, historians often refer to Augustus's reign as the Principate.

In return for the honors the Senate bestowed on him, Augustus transferred most of the legislative and judicial functions from the popular assemblies and the courts to the Senate. This, too, was a charade, since Augustus's control of appointments to the Senate and the senators' fear of the army turned the body into the emperor's rubber stamp, its authority

resting entirely on his good will. In 23 B.C., the people granted Augustus tribunician powers, thereby awarding him prestige as a "protector of the people," as well as the authority to veto Senate legislation. In 19 B.C., his consular power, which included the authority to convene the Senate and set its agenda, was extended for life. Augustus controlled the outer provinces directly, through the army and through the *legati* he appointed to govern them, and controlled the inner provinces indirectly, through his power to reject the proconsuls appointed by the Senate. He also possessed the power to make treaties and the authority to intervene in senatorial provinces. He could draw from the treasury any time he wanted, as well as from the vast personal wealth he had acquired during the civil war. (Indeed, from his own estate he contributed to the fund for discharged veterans and paid some other imperial expenses, so that he was comparatively poor when he died.) After 12 B.C., he served as *pontifex maximus* (Chief Priest). Although Augustus was careful not to portray himself as a god in Rome, he allowed himself to be worshipped by the foreign peoples of the provinces, on the grounds that it rendered them more obedient to the Roman will.

But perhaps the greatest source of Augustus's power was his own humility. Unlike his granduncle and adoptive father Julius Caesar, Augustus generally eschewed the appearance of arrogance. Even while consolidating power beyond the dreams of most kings, Augustus was careful to avoid the trappings of monarchy. He understood that although Romans of all classes thirsted for the stability offered by one-man rule, centuries of republican tradition had instilled in them a fierce hatred of the very word "king." Augustus's humility and magnanimity, when joined with his fiction of a restored republic, set the exhausted Romans at ease.

AUGUSTUS'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS (27 B.C.—A.D. 14)

Peace and Prosperity

The reign of Augustus was one of unprecedented peace and prosperity. During his rule, the doors to the temple of the god Janus, closed only in times of complete peace, were closed three times. The doors had been closed only twice in the centuries before Augustus.

When combined with the construction of durable roads throughout the empire, peace made extensive trade and travel possible. The increase in trade produced prosperity. Merchants even dispatched 120 ships per year to India via the Red Sea to trade their pots and other goods for Indian spices, jewels, and ivory and for Chinese silk. Augustus also increased prosperity by establishing an efficient monetary system, made possible by

elaborate mining facilities and augmented by local small change. Gold and silver coins were minted at Lugdunum (Lyons), while the senatorial mint in Rome produced copper and bronze coins. The images on Roman coins were frequently changed, allowing emperors to highlight their own recent accomplishments, or to introduce their chosen successor to the provinces.

During the few periods of war in Augustus's forty-one year reign, his generals extended the empire's northeastern frontier to the Danube River. Augustus established a professional army of twenty-eight legions, stationed it on the frontier, and largely succeeded in keeping it out of politics. The army proved a tremendous Romanizing influence. Towns sprouted around its camps (e.g., Cologne, Mainz, and Baden), as Roman soldiers intermarried with native women, settled down on their pensions, and became local dignitaries. After twenty-five years of service, foreigners who served in the auxiliaries were issued a pair of bronze tablets called a *diploma* (double tablets) that granted them full citizenship. Augustus also maintained fleets throughout the Mediterranean to transport troops and to suppress piracy.

Efficient Administration

Augustus also reduced the number of senators from 900 to 600, making the Senate more efficient. He appointed honest and efficient legati to govern the outer provinces. Respecting local cultures to a large extent, the legati emphasized provincial autonomy and local self-government. This pluralism was one of the wisest of Rome's policies. It enabled the Romans to hold together a vast empire of innumerable ethnic groups with a minimum of rebellion and to avoid an inefficient, centralized bureaucracy, thereby allowing them to maintain taxes at a tolerable level.

Augustus established a periodic census to monitor changes in the population, wealth, and resources of each province, thereby allowing him to shift the tax burden from those provinces least able to pay. Most money raised in the provinces remained there, to cover the expense of local administration; few provinces provided a surplus for Rome. Augustus reduced the number of taxes collected by private tax collectors. He assigned equites, as well as aristocrats, to financial posts, to the governorship of small provinces, to the command of armies, and to the Praetorian Guard, the palace guard of 9,000 men.

Augustus constructed another forum in Rome to relieve congestion in the original. It was narrower than he originally planned because he could not bring himself to evict the owners of the houses that would have to be demolished. He also cleared the Tiber of rubbish to improve navigation and to help prevent floods.

Augustus must rank as one of the most skillful and energetic administrators in history. In fact, he once expressed astonishment that Alexander the Great had devoted so much energy and attention to conquering an empire and so little to administering it properly.

Piety and Morality

Augustus rebuilt eighty-two temples destroyed during the civil wars, revived old priesthoods, and restored religious festivals. Holding to traditional Roman frugality, he lived in a modest house on Palatine Hill (the word "palace" derives from the more lavish royal houses later constructed there), ate frugally, and dressed in simple clothes made by his female relatives. At the same time that he banished Ovid for his more lascivious poems and for a mysterious scandal perhaps involving Augustus's promiscuous daughter Julia, Augustus also exiled his daughter for adultery. Concerned about the decline of traditional Roman values and fearing depopulation, he passed laws rewarding the production of legitimate children and penalizing adultery, bachelorhood, and childlessness.

The Patronage of Virgil

Augustus also added crucial imperial support to his adviser Gaius Cilnius Maecenas's long-standing patronage of poets. One poet Maecenas supported was Virgil (Publius Vergilius Maro; 70–19 B.C.), the master of Latin poetry. Virgil's *Eclogues* (c. 42–37 B.C.) and *Georgics* (36–29 B.C.) reinvigorated the pastoral theme, a theme first pursued by Hesiod and later by the Alexandrian poets. Alarmed by small farmers' abandonment of their farms and migration to the cities (in some cases, they were forcibly expelled from their farms to make way for the veterans of the civil wars), Virgil portrayed the rural lifestyle as the happiest and most virtuous. Virgil wrote: "Pallas [Athena] can keep her cities, but let the woods beyond all else please you and me."

The *Eclogues* consisted of ten brief, melodious, enigmatic, unpretentious poems. The locale was a composite of Arcadia, Sicily, and northern Italy, but was, above all, Virgil's own imaginative creation, existing nowhere in the real world. Virgil cast a sensuous, enchanted light on rural life, tempered by the good-natured banter of shepherds. His fourth eclogue, written while Augustus and Antony were still allies (40 B.C.), expressed the widespread belief that a savior would appear who would rescue the world from its many troubles. The theory that Virgil thought the savior would be the child of Antony and Octavia, Augustus's sister, has been discredited, leaving the matter a mystery. Early

Christians, noting Virgil's references to "the virgin," to a divine child who would rule the world in peace, to the "nullification" of sin, and to the destruction of "the snake," later believed that the poet had received a vision of Jesus from the Holy Spirit.

The *Georgics* celebrated the beauties, labor, and rewards of the farm, a place situated comfortably between the extremes of the savage wilderness and the corrupt city. In this poem, one of the most influential in Western literature, Virgil demonstrated true genius. His problem was a most difficult one: how to write a great poem that was also a manual of practical advice for farmers. Virgil succeeded by virtue of his incredible descriptive power and through his charming ascription of human sentiment to every element of nature. Rather than write, "Don't plant your crops too early," Virgil warns the farmer never to "entrust too early to reluctant soil a whole year's hopes." He ends the second *Georgic* with the pleasing line: "By now we have traversed a course of many leagues; high time to unyoke the steaming necks of our horses." In Virgil's capable hands even a storm seems beautiful. In his vivid imagination, rivers feel boats on their backs, ants put aside food for old age, bees engage in "mob violence," "the endive revels in the brook it drinks," green river banks "delight in parsley," and a bull who loses a joust for a heifer anguishes over "lost love" and goes into "exile," quitting "his stable and ancestral kingdom." The poet even manages to inject suspense into an otherwise mundane instruction to keep the pens clean: "Often beneath neglected pens there lurks a dangerous viper, shrinking from the daylight, or an adder, curse of cattle, such as love to creep into the shelter of dark buildings and stab the herd with poison." His description of a fallen ox, the victim of a deadly plague, is strangely moving: "Sadly the plowman goes to unyoke the mate that mourns his brother, and leaves the plow stuck there, its work unfinished. No shade of lofty trees, no luscious meadow, can cheer that beast again."

The *Georgics* dispensed advice concerning the cultivation of crops, the growing of trees, the raising of livestock, and the keeping of bees. Some of the advice was quite good. For instance, Virgil advised crop rotation over 1,700 years before it sparked the modern Agricultural Revolution. (Nonetheless, Virgil had a poor understanding of bees. Future dead white male and defender of patriarchy that he was, he thought bees were led by "kings" rather than queens and praised them for their sexual abstinence. He evidently accepted the myth that young bees were not produced by copulation, but were gathered from the flowers that mysteriously generated them. In other words, Virgil was not the right person to teach children about "the birds and the bees.")

In the *Georgics*, Virgil exhorted his fellow Romans to help regenerate the community after a century of civil war by returning to the plow. He wrote:

How lucky the farmers are—I wish they knew!
The Earth herself, most just, pours forth for them
An easy living from the soil, far off
From clashing weapons. Though the farmer has
No mansion with proud portals which spits out
A monster wave of morning visitors
From every room, nor do his callers gasp
At inlaid columns, bright with tortoiseshell,
Or gold-embroidered clothes or bronzes from
Ephyre, nor in his house is plain white wool
Dyed with Assyrian poison, nor does he
Corrupt his olive oil with foreign spice,
He has untroubled sleep and honest life.
Rich in all sorts of riches, with a vast
Estate, he has all the leisure to enjoy
A cave, a natural pond, a valley where
The air is cool—the mooing of the cows
Is ever present, and to sleep beneath
A tree is sweet. Wild animals abound
For hunting, and young people grow up strong,
Hardworking, satisfied with poverty.
Their gods are holy; their parents are revered.
Surely, when Justice left the earth she stayed
Last with these folk, and left some tokens here.

The pastoral theme was as much a staple of classical history as of classical poetry, of course. Classical historians considered Sparta and republican Rome models not merely because they had possessed mixed governments, but also because they had been agricultural societies. Greek and Roman historians credited the triumph of Sparta and Rome over their vice-ridden, commercial adversaries, Athens and Carthage, as much to their pastoral virtues as to their government form.

Virgil celebrated the mythic past of the Italian countryside, its olive-laden vines, its perpetual spring, and its freedom from harmful plants and animals. He exulted: "Hail, great mother of harvests, land of Saturn, mighty mother of men; in your honor I tell of the things of that art of husbandry which from ancient times has been your glory; I dare to unseal those sacred springs, and through Roman towns I sing the song which Hesiod sang to the Greeks. . . . I will be the first, if life is granted me, to lead the Muses in triumph from Greek Helicon to my native land."

Virgil also painted a vivid portrait of the high cost and unstoppable momentum of civil war. He wrote: "No due honor attends the plow. The fields, bereft of tillers, are all unkempt and in the forge the curved pruning-hook is made a straight hard sword. . . . Impious War is raging. As on a race-course, the barriers down, out pour the chariots, gathering speed from lap

to lap, and a driver, tugging in vain at the reins, is swept along by the horses and the heedless, uncontrollable car."

Virgil's greatest masterpiece was the *Aeneid* (29–19 B.C.), an epic poem modeled on Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The poem told the story of the Trojan Aeneas, who escaped the Greek destruction of Troy and moved to Italy, where his descendants founded Rome. The *Aeneid* effectively conveyed the Roman mission to conquer and "civilize" the world. The Sibyl of Cumae (the Roman version of the oracle of Delphi) guides Aeneas, newly arrived in Italy, to the underworld, where his father Anchises reveals to him the future glory of Rome. After his return to the earthly world, Aeneas even visits the site where his descendants, Romulus and Remus, are destined to establish the city. The god Vulcan gives him a shield engraved with designs that convey a further forecast of Rome's grand destiny. A depiction of the Battle of Actium, in which Augustus will defeat Antony and Cleopatra, forms the center of the shield. To Virgil, Augustus's victory represented the triumph of Roman civilization over eastern barbarism. The last four books of the *Aeneid* concern wars between Aeneas's Trojan émigrés and the Latin tribes, wars ended by Aeneas's marriage to Lavinia, a Latin princess. The *Aeneid* is an *Odyssey* (a voyage-adventure epic) followed by an *Iliad* (a war epic).

Although Aeneas is a soldier like Achilles and the leader of a traveling band like Odysseus, his dedication to public service contrasts with the individualism of the Greek heroes. His epithet is "the pious." Aeneas brings both his household gods and his aged father to Italy with him. His travels afford him numerous opportunities to lay aside his arduous destiny for a comfortable life in an existing city. His greatest temptation of this kind occurs in ancient Carthage. The goddess Venus (Aeneas's mother) makes Queen Dido of Carthage fall in love with him and offer him a permanent home. Aeneas stays in Carthage a year, until Jupiter sends Mercury to recall him to his duty. Dutiful Aeneas, though heartbroken, stoically follows the will of fate in opposition to his own desires. Aeneas abandons the desperate Dido, who commits suicide, after calling down a curse of deadly enmity between her descendants and Aeneas's. She cries out to Carthage: "Pursue his seed with your hatred for all ages to come. Let no kindness or truce be between the nations."

Although the myth of Aeneas and Dido could be used to justify the Roman destruction of Carthage, by surrounding it with an aura of inevitability, Virgil's poem displays a rare sympathy for most of Aeneas's defeated enemies—tragic figures swimming desperately against the majestic stream of Roman history. At the end of the poem, Aeneas hesitates before finally killing Turnus, his Latin rival and king of the Rutulians; the destiny of a city yet to be born has forced the noble Aeneas to abandon or destroy those whom he would much prefer to spare. (Historic distance

from a defeated foe, be it Troy for the Greeks, Carthage for the Romans, or the England of George III for Americans, often produces a certain magnanimity no less enlightened for its belatedness.) Concerning the Romans, Virgil has Jupiter declare: "For these I set no limits, world or time, but make the gift of empire without end." He adds that Rome's fate is to "bring the whole world under law's dominion."

Though Virgil had been under intense pressure from Maecenas to write an epic about Augustus, the poet had quickly realized that contemporary history is almost never a suitable subject for an epic. If familiarity does not necessarily breed contempt, it at least impedes the aura of grandeur essential to the epic form. Furthermore, the Battle of Actium, the moment of Augustus's triumph, had witnessed very little that might be considered heroic fighting; Augustus certainly had not killed hundreds with his own hands like Achilles or Hector. To have made Augustus the central character of an epic poem would have been to turn the poem into a farce. In addition, if Augustus were made the subject of the epic, there could be no sympathy for his defeated foes, which would remove a large portion of the pathos, the tragic element, that makes the *Aeneid* such a masterpiece. It is precisely because we feel the pain of the abandoned Dido and of the vanquished Latins that we can appreciate the human cost of Rome's fated success. Virgil's brilliant solution to the problem of how to make Augustus a focus of the *Aeneid* without actually making him its central character was perhaps the only solution that could have preserved the poem's grandeur. His solution was to use the stirring story of Aeneas to present Roman history as a progression culminating in Augustus. Virgil shrewdly presents the Battle of Actium as a tableau on a shield rather than as a narrative. The real focus of the *Aeneid* is neither Augustus nor Aeneas. It is Rome.

Finally, the poem serves one other purpose: to reconcile the recently enfranchised Italians with Rome. Jupiter and Juno agree to assuage the Latins' grief over their defeat by making the Italians themselves a source of Rome's future strength: "Italian hardiness will make Rome great." In this way, the vanquished Italians join the winning side and reconcile themselves to Roman destiny through participation in it. So wrote the poet from Cisalpine Gaul, the last part of Italy to be enfranchised.

Shortly before his death, Virgil instructed his friends to burn the *Aeneid*, perhaps because he had left some incomplete lines scattered throughout the poem. Fortunately for Western literature, Augustus ordered that the nearly finished work be published rather than burned.

One of the most revered poems in Western history, the *Aeneid* influenced Dante Alighieri, Geoffrey Chaucer, John Milton, Alfred Lord Tennyson, and numerous other poets. Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Milton's *Paradise Lost* were both modeled on the *Aeneid*. Indeed, Dante selected Virgil to represent all that was wise and good in the pagan world, assigning him the

task of guiding the narrator through the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio*, the first two portions of the *Divine Comedy*.

The Patronage of Horace

The second greatest poet of the Augustan Age was Horace (Quintus Horatius Flaccus; 65–8 B.C.), a native of southern Italy. Horace's father, a former slave and collector of auction payments, sacrificed much to secure his son a rigorous education in Rome and Athens. Although Augustus and Antony confiscated Horace's estate in retribution for his fighting with Brutus at Philippi, Maecenas, on the recommendation of Virgil, later made certain that Horace received the patronage of the magnanimous Augustus, including a famous Sabine farm.

Horace's *Epodes* (c. 41–31 B.C.) assaulted social abuses and praised the rural lifestyle, though sometimes with a palpable sense of irony. Horace wrote:

Happy the man who, free from business worries and free from interest owing, like the men of the old days, tills with his oxen his ancestral fields. . . . He keeps away from the Forum and the proud threshold of the powers that be. . . . He likes to recline now under an ancient oak, now on the thick grass. Meanwhile the brooks flow between the high banks, birds warble in the woods, and springs bubble with running water, a sweet invitation to repose. But when the wintry season of thundering Jove brings back rains and snows, either with his pack of hounds he drives the fierce boars into the traps, or arranges large meshed nets on polished sticks to snare the greedy thrushes. . . . If a modest wife does her part in tending the house and her dear children . . . piles high the sacred hearth with dry firewood, waiting for the return of her tired husband, gathers in a pen made of wattles the fat ewes in order to milk their distended udders, and, drawing from the keg new sweet wine, prepares a meal which she had not to pay for . . . amid such feasts, what joy to see the sheep returning home from pasture, the wearied oxen dragging along the upturned plowshare and the young slaves, industrious swarm of an opulent house, seated around the resplendent Lares.

But the sly poet could not resist adding, "So says Alfius, a moneylender, on the point of turning farmer," leaving the reader in doubt as to the seriousness of the portrait. (Thomas Jefferson once planned to inscribe an abbreviated version of this passage near a small, Greek-style temple he hoped to build on his burial ground. Of course, as a fervent supporter of agriculture and the rural lifestyle, Jefferson omitted the poem's ironic ending.)

In these early verses, written before the triumph of Augustus, Horace also lamented Rome's disastrous civil wars. He wrote:

Into what, what, do you wickedly plunge? Why do your hands draw swords from scabbards? Perhaps too little Latin blood has been spilled on battlefields

or Neptune's realm? And not that Romans might burn the haughty towers of emulous Carthage; not that the scatheless Briton might trudge in chains down the Sacred Way; but that in fulfillment of Parthian prayers the city might die by her own right hand. . . . So it goes: a bitter fate pursues the Romans, and the crime of fratricide, since the blood of Remus ran on the earth, the bane of his successors. . . . What Hannibal, whom parents wished away, could not destroy or tame, this impious generation of fated stock will waste and the land belong once more to beasts of prey.

Horace also wrote of the agonies of love. To the mysterious man who had stolen his lover's affection, he wrote bitterly: "And you, whoever you are, who amble happy and proud in my misfortune, though perhaps you are rich in flocks and land . . . and your beauty surpasses that of Nireus, alas, you shall bewail her favors transferred to another, and I shall laugh last."

Horace's *Satires* (35–30 B.C.), a collection of poems written in hexameters yet conversational in flow, rejected wealth and power and emphasized the need for serenity. They mocked familiar social types in a general and genial manner and displayed the remarkable variety of theme and tone that was to become one of Horace's trademarks.

Influenced by Alcaeus, Sappho, and the Hellenistic poets, Horace's *Odes* (c. 23–13 B.C.) were remarkably succinct. Alfred Lord Tennyson once called his lines "jewels five words long that on the stretched forefinger of all time sparkle forever." The theme of more than a third of the poems is friendship. Indeed, many of the verses are addressed to friends, offering advice and encouragement. Another third deal with the tribulations of love, with human nature, and with the countryside in a detached, charming, and ironic way. Horace declared: "Thrice happy the couple who are not torn apart by quarrels but are held in a bond of unbroken love which only death dissolves." He resolved to let others write epic poems about heroes while he wrote of the epic struggles between the sexes: "Flippant as ever, whether afire or fancy free, I sing of banquets and 'battles' of eager girls with neatly trimmed nails against the young men." A small group of odes glorify Augustus in gratitude for priceless peace. (Yet Horace also demonstrated genuine respect for Cleopatra, Augustus's fallen foe: "Resolved for death, she was brave indeed. She was no docile woman but truly scorned to be taken away in her enemy's ships, deposed, to an overweening Triumph.") Painfully aware of the approach of death, Horace resolved to live life to the fullest: "Pallid Death knocks impartially at the doors of hovels and mansions. . . . Be wise, decant the wine, prune back your long-term hopes. Life ebbs as I speak—so seize each day, and grant the next no credit. . . . Happy the man, and happy he alone, who can call today his own; he who secure within, can say, 'Tomorrow, do your worst, for I have lived today.'"

Horace's *Epistles* (c. 20 B.C.), which included influential literary criticism (especially in the *Ars Poetica*, an epistle on the art of poetry), revealed a kindly, tolerant, humane, realistic, and self-deprecating man. Against the literary critics who favored only archaic verse he argued: "Suppose the Greeks had resented newness as much as we do, what would now be old? And what would the people have to read and thumb with enjoyment, each man to his taste?" He defined a literary critic as "a grindstone which sharpens steel but has no part in the cutting."

Horace was buried next to Maecenas, his friend and patron, on Esquiline Hill in Rome. His poems, like Virgil's, held an honored place in Roman education within less than a century and influenced countless generations of poets.

The Patronage of Livy

Augustus also encouraged Livy (Titus Livius; 59 B.C.–A.D. 17), one of the greatest of the Roman historians. Livy wrote the *History of Rome* over a period of about thirty years, beginning in 26 B.C. A prose epic of 142 "books" (a classical "book" was roughly equivalent to one of our chapters), only 35 of which survive, the *History* charted the Roman past from the foundation of Rome to 9 B.C.

Livy's *History* was extremely patriotic. As R. H. Barrow put it: "[In Livy] Rome is the heroine inspiring Romans to heroic deeds to fulfill her destiny. Virgil and Livy perfected the language for showing the Roman at his noblest in action and character." Livy boasted: "If any nation deserves the privilege of claiming a divine ancestry that nation is our own." Indeed, Livy attributed Rome's success to its traditional values. He wrote: "I hope my passion for Rome's past has not impaired my judgment; for I do honestly believe that no country has ever been greater or purer than ours or richer in good citizens and noble deeds; none has been free for so many centuries from the vices of avarice and luxury; nowhere have thrift and plain living been for so long held in such esteem."

Although those parts of the *History* that concern Livy's own time have been lost, he made it clear in other passages that, although he admired the republican age above all, he was grateful to Augustus for restoring peace and order. (In Augustan Rome praise for the republic was not only permissible but encouraged, since Augustus claimed to have restored it.) Livy also echoed Augustus's fear of a moral decline. Livy wrote: "The might of an imperial people is beginning to work its own ruin. . . . Of late years wealth has made us greedy, and self-indulgence has brought us, through every form of sensual excess, to be, if I may so put it, in love with death both individual and collective." (In modern times, Pope John Paul II has referred to the prosperous, modern West as a society "in love with

death." Did he borrow the phrase from Livy?) Livy referred to "the sinking of the foundations of morality as the old teaching was allowed to lapse, then the final collapse of the whole edifice, and the dark dawning of our modern day when we can neither endure our vices nor face the remedies needed to cure them." He added: "The study of history is the best medicine for a sick mind; for in history you have a record of the infinite variety of human experience plainly set out for all to see; and in that record you can find for yourself and your country both examples and warnings, fine things to take as models, base things, rotten through and through, to avoid."

Livy wrote with astonishing skill and charm, in a style famously fluent and colorful. Yet most modern historians have judged Livy's work solid and dependable—aside from Livy's first ten books, which began with Aeneas and which were more mythological than historical.

THE FAILURES OF AUGUSTUS

The Loss of Varus's Legions

Aside from the exile of his own daughter, Augustus's greatest source of sorrow was the loss of three Roman legions under Publius Quinctilius Varus in the Teutoburger Wald in A.D. 9. The Romans were on the verge of conquering Germany when a group of Germanic tribes, led by Hermann, chief of the Cherusci, ambushed and slaughtered Varus's army. Hermann had served in the Roman army as an auxiliary, under the name of Arminius, and had even been awarded Roman citizenship and equestrian rank for his services. Varus was marching to suppress a fictitious revolt reported by German conspirators when his legions were ambushed. He committed suicide when the battle was lost. Augustus made the anniversary a national day of mourning. He once beat his head on a door and shouted, "Quinctilius Varus, give me back my legions!" The Roman failure to conquer the Germanic tribes allowed these tribes to conquer Rome four centuries later.

Tiberius (A.D. 14–37)

But perhaps Augustus's very success as a ruler constitutes his greatest failure. At best, his reign was a mixed blessing for Rome: by making the Roman people content to live under an emperor, Augustus paved the way for the likes of Tiberius, Caligula, and Nero.

When Augustus died in 14, there was no question as to his successor. All but one of his male relatives had passed away, some rather mysteriously,