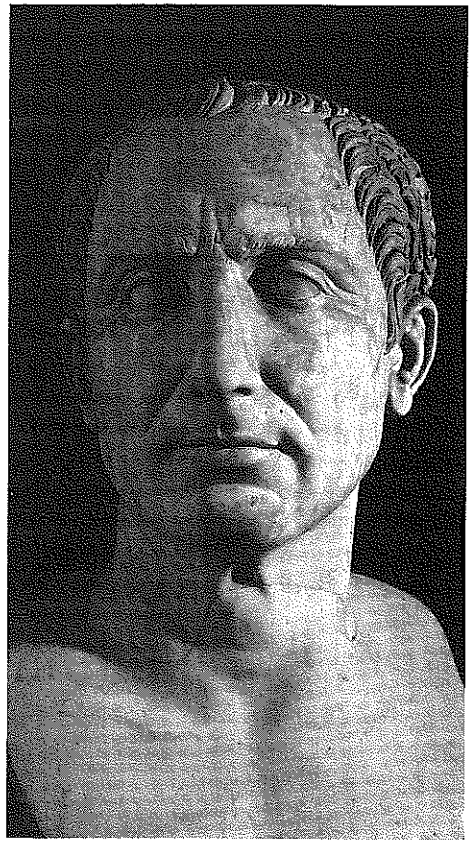

8

✝

Julius Caesar: Destroyer of the Roman Republic

It was Julius Caesar who gave the tottering Roman republic the final push that plunged it over the cliff of despotism. Having conquered Gaul for the Roman empire, Caesar found himself in a quarrel with Pompey that led to his dictatorship over Rome. Though Caesar proved a capable dictator, his vanity and ambition led to his assassination, which led the republic into further chaos that ended only with the accession of Augustus as the first Roman emperor.

ROMAN EXPANSION IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN, 200–133 B.C.

The destruction of the Carthaginian military power during and after the Second Punic War opened the Mediterranean world to Roman expansion. When King Philip V of Macedon allied himself with the Carthaginians during that war, even sending 4,000 Macedonians to fight with Hannibal at Zama, the Romans defeated him and, in the process, conquered Illyria. After the war, the Romans responded enthusiastically to the call of Pergamum and Rhodes for aid against Philip. In 197 B.C., a Roman legion under Titus Flamininus defeated Philip at Cynoscephalae in Thessaly, killing 20,000 Macedonians and capturing another 11,000.

As in most of the Romans' other battles against the Macedonians and Greeks, the chief cause of Roman victory was the army's ability to take advantage of the phalanx's woeful lack of maneuverability. Relying on the careful overlapping of heavy, twenty-one-foot-long spears, the phalanx

was highly effective in opening charges but required level ground without obstructions and a perfect coordination between soldiers that the Romans, with their more maneuverable maniples, quickly learned to disrupt. The Romans surged into the inevitable gaps in the phalanx that formed during battle and assaulted the enemy from the side and rear. When the enemy had to turn their bulky, unwieldy spears to face such threats, they inevitably lost the close coordination on which the phalanx depended.

As a result of the victory at Cynoscephalae, the Romans were able to impose a treaty on Philip that limited him to 5,000 troops, deprived him of his elephants, and fined him 1,000 talents. Furthermore, the treaty prohibited Philip from waging war outside Macedon without Roman permission.

In 190 B.C., the Romans halted a Seleucid invasion of Greece that King Antiochus III had undertaken on the advice of Hannibal and of the Aetolian League, which desired territory in the Roman protectorate of Macedon. Though outnumbered 74,000 to 30,000, Scipio Africanus and his brother Lucius defeated Antiochus at Magnesia in Asia Minor. The Romans stripped the Seleucid emperor of his navy, his elephants, and a large sum of money.

In 168 B.C., the Romans, under Lucius Aemilius Paulus (a descendant of the Paulus who had died at Cannae), defeated a coalition of Greeks, led by Perseus, Philip V's successor, at Pydna in Macedon. Under orders from the Senate to treat the rebels harshly, Paulus sold 150,000 inhabitants of Epirus into slavery. The Romans also deported 1,000 leaders of the Achaean League to Rome. One of these hostages was the historian Polybius.

In 148 B.C., when anti-Roman sentiment flared in Greece as a result of the Senate's policy of supporting oligarchies there, the Romans burned Corinth. They then converted all of Greece into a collection of provinces governed by a Roman proconsul.

Under the Roman Empire, Greece was transformed from a place of political and military significance into a center for study and tourism. Long after the Spartans had abandoned their own unique political and social systems, they refrained from formally repealing their most famous laws so as to attract wealthy Roman tourists. Romans traveled hundreds of miles to see the reenactment of the notorious Spartan custom of flogging their boys until they fell unconscious—an ancient practice now performed in a specially built theater, not for discipline's sake, but as a tourist attraction. The Romans looted Greece for slaves, books, and art. The employment of well-educated Greek slaves was one of the principal means through which Roman aristocrats were "Hellenized."

In 133 B.C., when Attalus III, the king of Pergamum, died without an heir, he left his kingdom to Rome. Fearing a popular revolt when he died, he knew that the Romans would maintain law and order and would continue to follow his policy of favoring the aristocrats over the masses. The Romans had now conquered almost the whole Mediterranean basin.

THE THIRD PUNIC WAR (149–146 B.C.)

Meanwhile, the Romans had dealt a final, crushing blow to Carthage. Although the Romans had stripped Carthage of most of its armed forces and empire after the Second Punic War, some Romans remained obsessed by the fear that Carthage would threaten Rome again one day. Hence, in the mid-second century B.C., when Carthage revived economically, Roman extremists demanded the complete destruction of the city.

Cato the Elder

The leader of the anti-Carthaginian faction was the austere Cato the Elder. "Cato" was not the Roman's original name, but an epithet meaning "wise" or "experienced." The red-haired, grey-eyed Cato was an old-fashioned Roman, a man who displayed great harshness toward slaves. Despising weakness and luxury, Cato ate and worked beside his own slaves. His hero was Manius Curius, who had led the Romans to victory against the Samnites and against Pyrrhus, but who had tilled his little farm with his own hands and whose diet had consisted mainly of boiled turnips. Cato admired simple Fabius and despised flamboyant Scipio. Equating simplicity with virtue and extravagance with vice, Cato was alarmed at the growing influence of Greek culture in Rome. When addressing an Athenian audience in Latin, he was appalled at the number of words his Greek translator required to express the same sentiments. He concluded that the Greeks were mere bladders of wind—cunning talkers, rather than pragmatic doers. (While it is true that a florid rhetorical style was then in vogue among the Hellenistic Greeks, Cato probably also had a poor translator.)

Having become censor in 184 B.C., Cato set about purifying Roman society of "the extreme luxury and degeneracy of the age," even expelling Scipio's brother from the Senate for holding drinking parties. He expelled another senator for embracing his wife in the presence of his daughter, placed stiff taxes on luxury items, severed the pipes by which people diverted the public water supply free of charge, and demolished houses that encroached on public land.

A relentless enemy of Carthage, Cato completed every Senate speech, no matter the topic, with the refrain, "Carthage must be destroyed!" He once brought a basket of large North African figs into the Senate chamber to show the senators what the literal fruits of a Roman conquest of Carthage would look like.

The War

In 149 B.C., the extremists received their wish. Rome presented a series of outrageous demands to Carthage, including one that all Carthaginians leave the city and settle at least ten miles inland, a move that would destroy the Carthaginian economy. When the Carthaginians refused, the Romans, under Scipio Aemilianus, besieged the city. Though often on the verge of starvation, the Carthaginians fought heroically for three years.

When the Romans took the city in 146 B.C., they killed every male Carthaginian and sold every woman and child into slavery. The Romans then reduced all of the buildings to rubble. Although the popular legend that the Romans plowed up the city and poured salt into the ground, so that nothing would grow there for many years, is probably false, the Romans did forbid the resettlement of Carthage for a quarter of a century. (Julius Caesar later rebuilt it.) Rome then annexed the remaining Carthaginian territory. Ironically, Cato the Elder had died in the first year of the Third Punic War. He did not live to see the enemy crushed.

THE EFFECTS OF THE NEW ROMAN EXPANSION

By making apparent the tremendous importance of the plebeians to the army, the first phase of Roman expansion, the gradual conquest of Italy, had helped produce a republican form of government. By contrast, the Romans' rapid conquest of the Mediterranean basin helped destroy the same republic. By further increasing the already vast inequalities of wealth between the rich and the poor, the new Roman expansion generated class warfare, which, in turn, produced the chaos and violence that paved the way for the emperors.

The Decline of the Popular Assemblies

The new Roman expansion strengthened the position of the wealthy and undermined that of the poor. The sudden and extensive expansion of Roman territory transformed Rome from a village into an imperial center, housing a host of foreign and domestic supplicants. It is estimated that the city possessed nearly 750,000 people by the mid-second century B.C. Under such conditions, the average Roman found it difficult to participate in government, even to the small extent that he had before. The popular assemblies became far too large to make the swift decisions required of an empire. Hence, both the Senate and the aristocratic proconsuls whom they appointed to govern the provinces wielded great power. The aristocrats had always held the upper hand, of course, but the commoners were now losing what little power they had once possessed.

Inequalities

Ever increasing numbers of commoners lost their land and became the clients of the aristocrats. Moving to Rome, they were forced to support their masters' political interests in order to earn a living. Between 233 and 133 B.C., a mere twenty-six noble families furnished three-quarters of the consuls; no more than ten families furnished half. Some aristocrats possessed armies of client-bodyguards.

How were the commoners driven off their farms and into clientage in Rome? First, long-term military service overseas had forced many soldiers to neglect their farms. Second, Hannibal's soldiers had destroyed many farms. Third, the commoners could not compete with the massive amounts of produce grown on the aristocrats' plantations (the *latifundia*). The Senate sold aristocrats these plantations in the conquered territories, as well as a slave labor force, consisting mostly of prisoners of war, at a relatively low price. The Senate sold the land in large blocks, so that only the wealthy could afford it. The Senate also "rented" some of the land to aristocrats, and when the wealthy renters began to consider the land their own—building homes and family tombs on it and using it for dowries—the Senate did nothing to resist such claims. Some owners of the latifundia took advantage of new farming techniques to grow grapes and olives, while others continued to cultivate grain and to raise sheep and cattle. Small farmers could not compete with this large-scale production, which depressed prices. The potent combination of neglect, property damage, and depressed prices forced many veterans to sell their farms to aristocrats, move to Rome, and become their clients. Those whom the overseas wars had enriched exploited those whom they had impoverished.

The "Punic Curse"

Rome suffered a general moral decline that many observers attributed to the "Punic Curse," since the incredible wealth that helped produced the decline was the indirect result of the Roman conquest of Carthage. Newfound luxury undermined the traditional Roman values of frugality, discipline, honesty, and respect for law, the values on which the republic depended. Aristocrats sought profit with a ruthless abandon. Vote-buying and ballot box stuffing proliferated. The crushing poverty and slum environment of the commoners rendered them equally cruel and lazy. The new class of merchants, moneylenders, tax collectors, and government contractors spawned by the rapid growth of the empire proved equally corrupt. The low-born wealthy were called *equites*, members of the equestrian order, because they could afford to maintain a horse and serve in the cavalry.

Roman proconsuls and tax collectors plundered their provinces shamelessly, both for Rome and for themselves. Far from the prying eyes of the Senate, and largely ignorant of local cultures, the underpaid and overworked proconsuls extorted as much wealth as possible from the helpless inhabitants of their provinces. One proconsul explained that he needed to extract three fortunes from his province—one to pay the debts incurred in bribing senators to obtain the position, another to bribe the jury at his trial for corruption, and a third fortune to last the rest of his life.

The Romans also treated their slaves harshly. As a result, there were slave revolts in 139, 134–131, and 104–101 B.C. The largest slave rebellion occurred in 73–71 B.C., when the Thracian gladiator Spartacus, who had served as an auxiliary in the Roman army, led 70,000 slaves in revolt. The slave army defeated five separate Roman forces and plundered much of Italy before the rebels were finally overwhelmed at Lucania, their leader killed in battle. The Romans crucified 6,000 of the rebels and lined the Appian Way, Rome's main highway, with their rotting corpses.

THE AGRARIAN REFORM MOVEMENT OF THE GRACCHI

Tiberius Gracchus

In 133 B.C., at the age of twenty-nine, Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus, a grandson of Scipio Africanus, was elected tribune. Tiberius recognized that growing inequalities between the rich and the poor threatened traditional Roman values and the republic itself. He decided that the way to return Rome to its old values was to restore the backbone of the Roman republic, the small farmer. Accordingly, Tiberius proposed that the comitia tributa reenact a law of 367 B.C. (which had never been enforced) limiting the size of estates in the public lands (land rented out by the state) to roughly 300 acres per person. (In ancient times, due to primitive technology, 300 acres was considered a vast estate. Most small farmers possessed only a few acres.) Although this 300-acre plot would then become the renter's permanent property, the surplus land would be confiscated and allotted to the landless, who would pay a small rent to the state. Tiberius's moderate proposal even included compensation for the excess land the aristocrats would have to surrender, land that was not really theirs. Tiberius declared: "The wild beasts that roam over Italy have their dens and holes to lurk in, but the men who fight and die for our country enjoy the common air and light and nothing else. It is their lot to wander with their wives and children, houseless and homeless, over the face of the earth. . . . The truth is that they fight and die to protect the wealth and luxury of others, and though they are called masters of the world, they have not a single clod of earth that is their own." Slogans scrawled on nearly

every portico, monument, and wall in the city urged Tiberius to proceed with land redistribution.

The comitia tributa passed the law, but the Senate bribed the tribune Marcus Octavian (an ancestor of Augustus) into vetoing it. Corrupted from its original purpose of blocking the aristocratic acts of the Senate, the tribunal veto power was now being used to block the popular will.

Infuriated, Tiberius responded by pushing through a second law that lacked a compensation provision. He pleaded with Octavian either to change his position or resign for the sake of justice and the republic. Octavian seemed moved but refused. Tiberius then persuaded the comitia tributa to remove Octavian from office and pass the bill again. The impeachment of a tribune was unprecedented, but Tiberius argued that the people could move from office any official they elected. However, the Senate, which controlled the treasury, refused to allocate sufficient funds for the enforcement of the land redistribution law. Intent on ensuring the enforcement of the new act, Tiberius attempted to bypass the Senate by using funds Attalus III of Pergamum had bequeathed to Rome.

Violating an almost sacred custom against consecutive terms, Tiberius ran for reelection as tribune. He spoke of the need to reduce the term of military service (it was nearly thirty years) and to give the people the authority to hear appeals from the patrician-dominated juries.

On election day near the end of 132 B.C., fearing that Tiberius intended to make himself a king, a crowd of senators and their clients marched on Tiberius and clubbed him and 300 of his followers to death. The senators threw all of the bodies into the Tiber River, thereby denying them a proper burial. Other followers were banished or executed without trial. The traditional Roman reverence for law was giving way to corrupt, unconstitutional acts.

Gaius Gracchus

Gaius Sempronius Gracchus, Tiberius's younger brother by nine years, was elected tribune for the year 123 B.C. So many people poured into Rome from the rest of Italy to support Gaius that there was not enough shelter for them. Gaius was a passionate orator, in sharp contrast to Tiberius, who had possessed an almost Olympian calm. In fact, Gaius ordered one of his slaves to strike a soft tone on an instrument whenever Gaius's passion overcame him during a speech. After hearing the tone, Gaius would become aware of himself and regain his composure.

As tribune, Gaius pledged to secure the enforcement of Tiberius's agrarian law so that Roman colonies could be established at Tarentum, Capua, and Carthage, areas the Romans had depopulated. Gaius cultivated equestrian support by appointing equites to special juries that tried proconsuls

for corruption and by issuing contracts to their tax collection companies. These private companies, which collected taxes for Rome in the provinces, were allowed to collect surplus taxes as profit. (It is no wonder that tax collectors were the most hated figures of the New Testament.) Gaius also prevented food riots and profiteering in times of famine by persuading the comitia tributa to purchase grain and store it in warehouses. The food would then be sold to the poor of Rome at cost, slightly below its market value. (Politicians later turned this price stabilization measure into a dole, which they manipulated for personal advantage.) Aristocrats hated the measure, fearing that it would undermine the dependence of the poor on them for food and, with it, the master-client relationship. Gaius also pleased the poor and angered the aristocrats by offering free seats at the gladiatorial contests. (The aristocrats rented seats to the poor.) Gaius persuaded the comitia tributa to insist that no one under the age of seventeen be conscripted into the army and that soldiers be issued free clothing. He supported the construction of roads, to the benefit of country farmers.

But Gaius lost the support of poor Romans by advocating the extension of full citizenship to Rome's Latin allies and the "Latin right" for its other Italian allies. The first step toward citizenship, the Latin right included the granting of citizenship to the leaders of a foreign people. Fearing that they would lose control of the comitia tributa to non-Romans, the poor citizens of Rome zealously guarded their privilege of citizenship. Due to a loss of support among the poor, combined with electoral fraud, Gaius suffered a defeat in his bid for a third term near the end of 122 B.C.

Gaius's defeat led to some minor skirmishing between factions, which provided the Senate with a pretext to declare martial law at the beginning of 121 B.C. The Senate ordered the Italian allies who supported Gaius to leave the city and called for the murder of Gaius himself. His supporters proved cowardly: rather than aiding him in evading the assassins that pursued him, Gaius's followers merely shouted at him to run faster. Knowing that the consul Opimius had agreed to reward Gaius's murderer with the weight of his head in gold, the assassin cleverly emptied the brain and filled the skull with molten lead, thereby increasing its weight to nearly eighteen pounds. Three thousand of Gaius's followers were also arrested and executed. The bodies of the victims were hurled into the Tiber, their property was confiscated, and their wives were even forbidden to mourn publicly.

The Romans' failure to enact Gaius's citizenship law, combined with Rome's growing harshness toward its Italian allies, eventually led the Italians to revolt (90–88 B.C.). Having loyally endured the horrors and hardships of two centuries of constant warfare on behalf of Rome, many Italians were furious at the Romans' unwillingness to grant them full citizenship. The Italians feared that, without voting rights, they might be dispossessed of their land to make room for Roman veterans. After this "Social War" (so called because the Latin term for the Italian allies was *socii*), Rome was forced to grant citizenship to all Italians south of the Po River. Those to the north of the Po, mostly Gauls, were granted the Latin right.

THE FIRST ROMAN CIVIL WAR: MARIUS VERSUS SULLA

Rome was increasingly divided between two factions, the Optimates, who favored the aristocrats, and the Populares, who favored the poor. (Even the leaders of the Populares were generally wealthy.) This schism led to three bloody civil wars in Rome.

Marius

In 107 B.C., Rome faced a grave crisis. A violent and corrupt Numidian king named Jugurtha (the grandson of Masinissa) was waging war with his brother for complete control of Numidia, in contradiction to the settlement the Romans had imposed. Soldiers under Jugurtha (though perhaps not acting on his order) even murdered Roman merchants who had sided with his brother. Partly because Jugurtha had bribed some of the senators, the Senate was reluctant to act against him at first. (According to the Roman historian Sallust, Jugurtha made the famous statement about Rome: "Here is a city put up for sale, and its days are numbered if it finds a buyer.")

Furious at the Senate, the comitia tributa ordered the consul Gaius Marius, an *eques*, to proceed to North Africa and crush Jugurtha. It was the first time the assembly had ever insisted on assigning a general to a command, a power traditionally reserved for the Senate. A hard-bitten soldier from the country town of Arpinum, Marius declared regarding the aristocrats: "They call me vulgar and unpolished, because I do not know how to put on an elegant dinner and do not have actors at my table or keep a cook who has cost me more than my farm overseer. All this, my fellow citizens, I am proud to admit." He also expressed pride at not having studied Greek literature.

In 106 B.C., Marius defeated Jugurtha's army. Having captured and imprisoned Jugurtha through the treachery of an ally soon after, the Romans starved him to death. In 102 and 101 B.C., Marius followed this triumph with a successful defense of Italy against two large Germanic tribes, one of which had routed a Roman army and inflicted 80,000 casualties a few years earlier.

Marius's army was composed of landless citizens (he disregarded the small property qualification for service in the army) whom he personally equipped with javelins that broke on impact so that the enemy could not throw them back. Marius also made the army more mobile by having soldiers carry their own entrenching tools and other equipment rather than relying on vulnerable baggage trains. Marius transformed the Roman

army from a militia equipped by, and loyal to, Rome, into a professional army equipped by, and loyal to, its commander. He used the threat of armed force to overcome Senate opposition to the distribution of land in North Africa to his troops—a tactic unheard of during the early days of the republic. But at least Marius did not yet take the opportunity to seize Rome. He contented himself with being elected consul six years in a row between 105 and 100 B.C., though Roman law prohibited consuls from holding office two consecutive terms.

Sulla

In 88 B.C., King Mithridates VI of Pontus (northeastern Asia Minor) led Greece and Asia Minor, both severely oppressed by corrupt proconsuls, tax collectors, and moneylenders, into revolt against Rome. Mithridates slaughtered 80,000 Italian men, women, and children living in his territory. Both the Senate and the comitia tributa claimed supreme authority to put down the revolt, and each selected its own general. While the comitia tributa chose Marius, the Senate selected Lucius Cornelius Sulla, who had once served as Marius's quaestor but was now his rival.

After failing to find and kill Marius, who fled to North Africa, Sulla set sail for the East. Marius then returned to Rome in Sulla's absence, allowing his troops to loot and murder and even execute a few Optimates, including a consul. Having put down Mithridates' revolt in 86–85 B.C., Sulla then returned to Rome to rout Marius's army, which had been weakened by the leader's death from pleurisy. Thousands of Romans died in the civil war, including many senators; the Senate had been reduced from its usual 300 members to about 150.

In 82 B.C., the Senate appointed the victorious Sulla dictator for an unlimited term, another unconstitutional act, and assigned him the task of revising the Roman political system. Sulla transferred almost all government functions to the Senate, leaving the popular assemblies and the tribunes virtually powerless. He removed equites from juries, returning nearly all judicial power to the Senate. To hobble popular leaders, he prohibited men from holding the same office twice within a ten-year period. To weaken the position of tribune, by depriving it of ambitious leaders, he prohibited former tribunes from running for higher offices and restricted the tribune's veto power.

Worst of all, Sulla "proscribed" (listed for execution) his own enemies and the enemies of his friends. His soldiers killed 30,000 to 50,000 people, so many that even the Senate begged him to stop. The victims included forty senators (Populares) and 1,600 equites, whose property Sulla confiscated and distributed among his 120,000 troops. Indeed, some Romans may have been killed purely for their property. Sulla expanded the Senate from 150 to 600 members, packing it with his own supporters.

But Sulla was not personally ambitious. He wanted only to "cleanse" Rome by restoring the Senate to a dominant position. In 81 B.C., he voluntarily surrendered power. After serving as consul in 80–79 B.C., he returned to his rural estate and died peacefully in 78 B.C. If Rome had escaped a permanent dictatorship, it was due solely to the fact that Marius and Sulla still possessed a few scruples about openly assuming such power. Rome would not be so fortunate in the future.

THE SECOND ROMAN CIVIL WAR: POMPEY VERSUS CAESAR

Pompey's Conquest

The First Civil War accelerated the trend toward factionalism and personal ambition. In 70 B.C., and again in 67 B.C., Pompey (Gnaeus Pompeius) and Marcus Licinius Crassus were elected consul (partly through vote-buying), though Pompey was below the legal age for that position. Though they had supported Sulla during his dictatorship, Pompey and Crassus won the favor of the masses by repealing nearly all of Sulla's laws. They reduced the senatorial representation in juries to one-third and restored the tribunician power.

In 67 B.C., over Senate objections, the comitia tributa gave Pompey temporary dictatorial power to clear the Mediterranean of the pirates who had proliferated as a result of the Senate's neglect of the navy. With a fleet of nearly 1,000 ships, the pirates had captured or looted nearly 400 towns. Proceeding methodically, Pompey cleared the sea of pirates in three months, thereby ending the threat to Rome's grain supplies.

As part of an effort to put down yet another revolt led by Mithridates, Pompey then spent four years conquering the remaining part of the Seleucid Empire, which included Syria, Armenia, Phoenicia, Pontus, and Cilicia (southeastern Asia Minor). He also conquered Judea (Israel), an independent kingdom that had successfully revolted against the Seleucids a century earlier. Thousands of Jews threw themselves to the ground before Pompey and begged him not to desecrate the Great Temple of Jerusalem by entering it since no Gentile could enter the temple without desecrating it. This display only convinced Pompey that the temple must contain great riches, so he barged in, even marching into the Holy of Holies, its innermost sanctum. The Roman historian Tacitus later declared: "It is a fact well known that he found no image, no statue, no symbolical representation of the Deity; the whole presented a naked dome; the sanctuary was unadorned and simple." When the dumbfounded Pompey emerged from the temple, he exclaimed in wonder, "It is empty; there is nothing there but darkness!" Pompey's reaction typified Roman confusion concerning the Jews and their worship of an invisible, omnipotent God. Nevertheless,