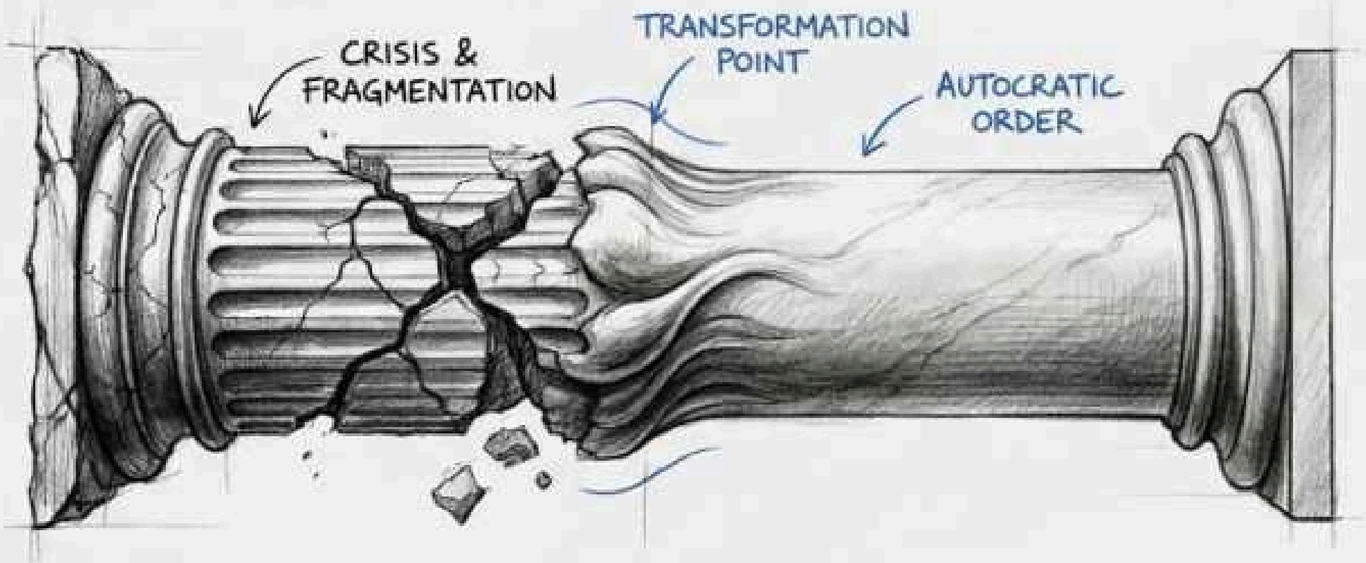
# A century of crisis transformed the Roman Republic into an autocratic Empire

¶ 5.1

Generals use armies against Rome → Caesar & Augustus change the system → Imperial height

Reform & Violence | Rise of Generals | The Principate

133 BCE — 78 BCE — 27 BCE — 14 CE →



Conquest enriched a few while leaving ordinary farmers in poverty

¶ 5.2

$$\Delta \text{Conquest} \propto \text{Wealth}_{\text{elite}} \Rightarrow \text{Poverty}_{\text{farmers}}$$



| The Reformers | The Vested Wealth |
| --- | --- |
| Tiberius Gracchus (133 BCE) & Gaius Gracchus (121 BCE) | Land-holding Senators |
| Agenda: Distribute public land to poor citizens. | Agenda: Protect their vast holdings. |
| 133 ~~BCE~~ → Assassinated in riots. | 121 ~~BCE~~ |

# Gaius Marius fundamentally shifted the loyalty of the Roman army

¶ 5.3

~~State~~ → Commander

$L_{army}$ = Pay + Retirement Land

Landless men are permitted to join the army (circa 107 BCE).

↓

Soldiers become entirely dependent on their general for pay and retirement plots.

↓

Personal loyalty to the commander supersedes civic duty to Rome.

← Marius was elected consul seven times.



# Rome won the Social War on the battlefield but surrendered in politics

¶ 5.4

91 BCE: Italian allies rebel (The Social War, from the Latin word for allies).




**Victory (Battlefield) + Concession (Politics) = Citizenship (89 BCE)**

(Granted to nearly all free Italians)

# Sulla proved that an ambitious general could capture the capital

¶ 5.5

**88 BCE: The Unthinkable Precedent.**
Sulla marches his army directly on Rome—an act no Roman commander had ever done.

↓

**82–79 BCE: Dictatorship.**
Sulla rules by force, temporarily strengthening the Senate before his retirement.

↓

**Mechanism of Terror:**
The use of Proscriptions (published lists of political enemies marked for death).

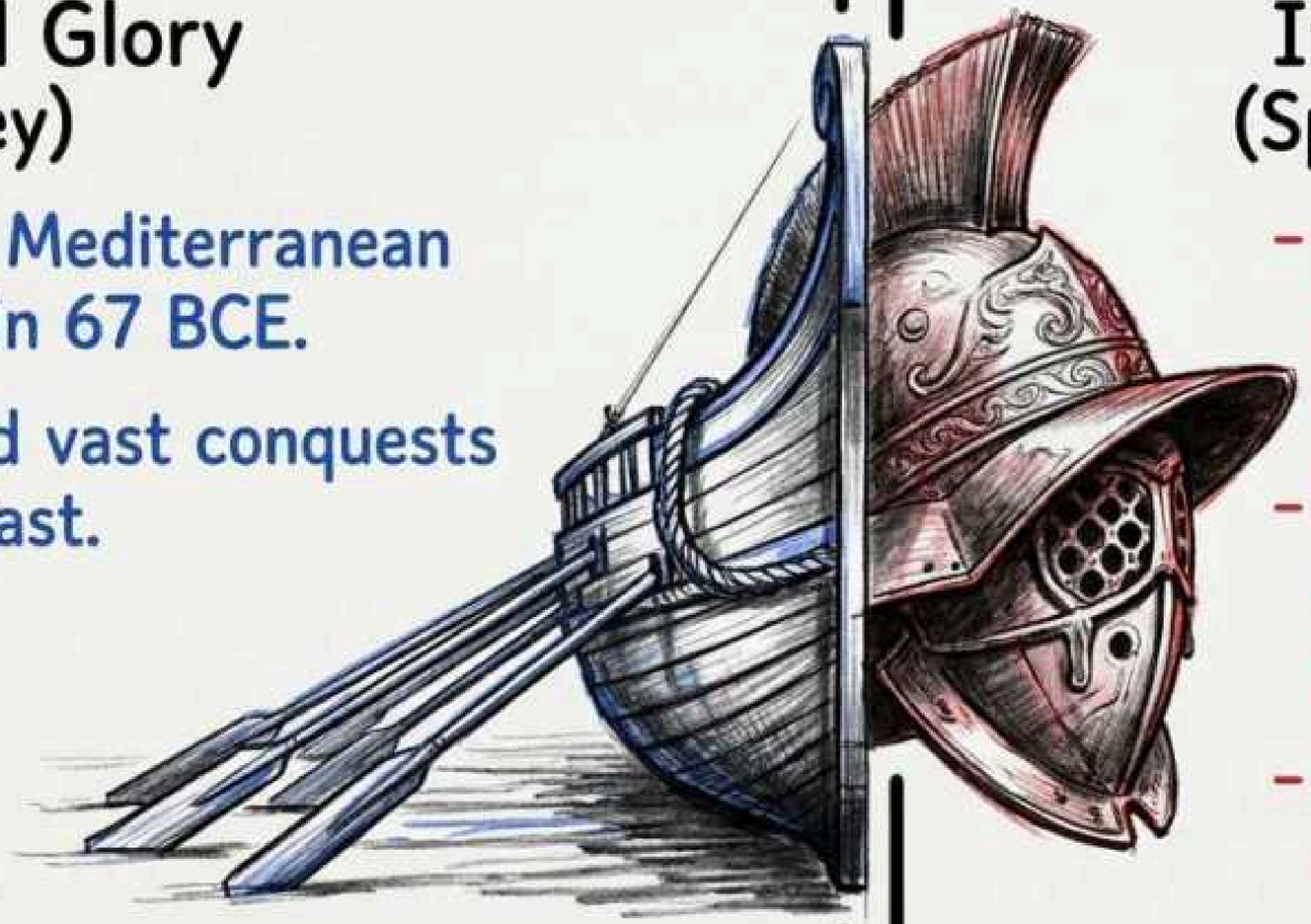


# Ambitious successors pursued external glory while crushing internal uprisings

¶ 5.6

## External Glory (Pompey)

- Cleared Mediterranean pirates in 67 BCE.
- Achieved vast conquests in the East.



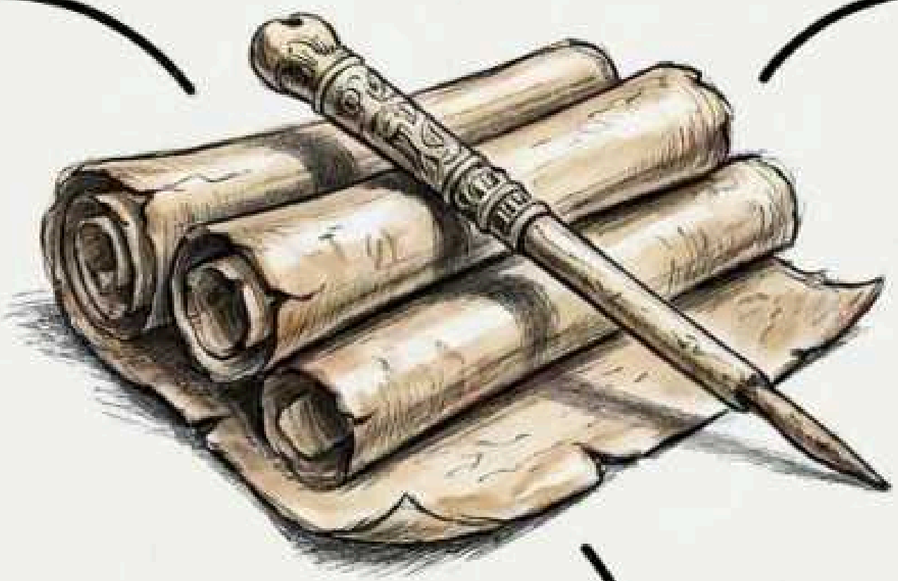
## Internal Threat (Spartacus & Crassus)

- 73–71 BCE: Uprising of enslaved people led by a gladiator.
- Defeated several Roman armies before being crushed by Crassus.
- Thousands of captives crucified along the Appian Way.

# Cicero's surviving writings provide an intimate view of a fatal political landscape

¶5.7

63 BCE: Consulship. Cicero successfully exposes the plot by Catiline to seize power.

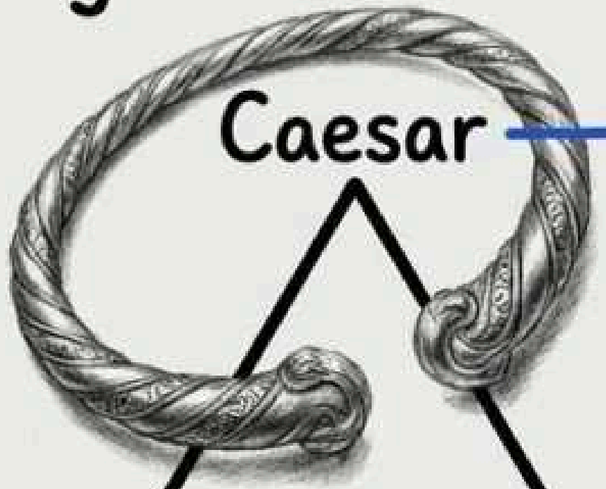


The Primary Sources: A massive survival of letters and speeches that grant historians an unusually intimate view of Roman politics.

43 BCE: Assassination. Killed by agents of the men he had fiercely attacked in his speeches.

# The First Triumvirate divided the Republic into a fragile three-way alliance

¶ 5.8



Caesar → Governed and conquered Gaul (modern France) from 58 to 50 BCE, documenting it in his Commentaries.

60 BCE Alliance

The death of Crassus breaks the triangle, leaving Caesar and Pompey on a collision course.

Remained centered in Rome. ← Pompey

Crassus → Sought glory in Parthia.

Carrhae, 53 BCE

¶ 5.9

# Crossing the Rubicon triggered the final collapse of the Republican system

49 BCE (The Ultimatum): The Senate orders Caesar to give up his army.

**The Decision Gate**

Caesar crosses the Rubicon (a small border river) with a single legion. Civil war begins.



48 BCE: Defeats Pompey at Pharsalus (Greece), then follows him to Egypt to support Cleopatra VII.

46 / 44 BCE: Achieves firm control of Rome and is named Dictator for Life.

# Caesar's reforms stabilized Rome, but his monarchical honors terrified the Senate

¶ 5.10

365 days + $\frac{1}{4}$ day = Julian Year (46 BCE)

| Constructive Reforms | Destructive Optics |
| --- | --- |
| - Settled veterans in colonies<br>- Extended citizenship<br>- Initiated massive building projects<br>- Forgave many opponents | - Accepted honors that looked monarchical<br>- Convinced many senators that the Republic was ending |



# The assassins intended to save the Republic but only guaranteed its end

¶ 5.11

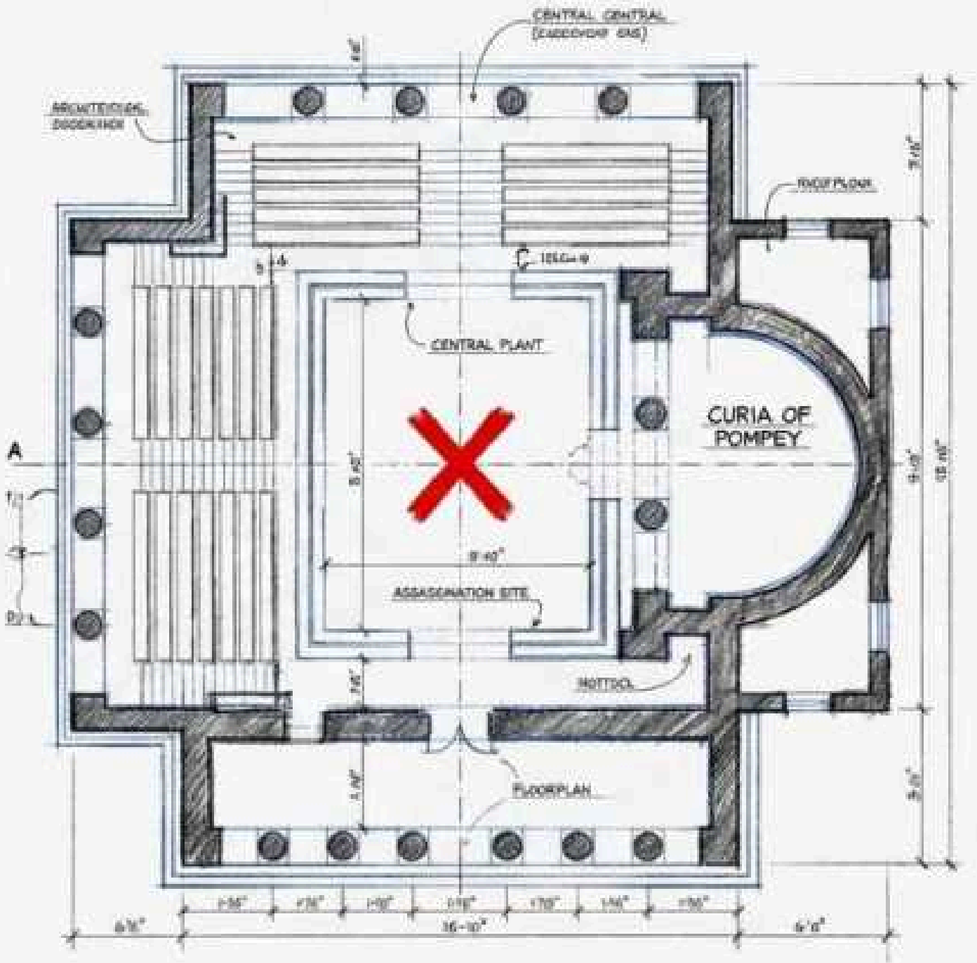
Intention

Senators led by Brutus and Cassius stab Caesar to death to save the Republic.

March 15, 44 BCE
(The Ides of March)

Reality

The common people and soldiers heavily favored Caesar. Backlash drives conspirators from conspirators from Italy, triggering yet another civil war.



# Octavian eliminated his rivals to claim unmatched power over the Roman world

¶ 5.12

The Second Triumvirate (Octavian, Antony, Lepidus)

Brutus & Cassius

Battle of Philippi (42 BCE)

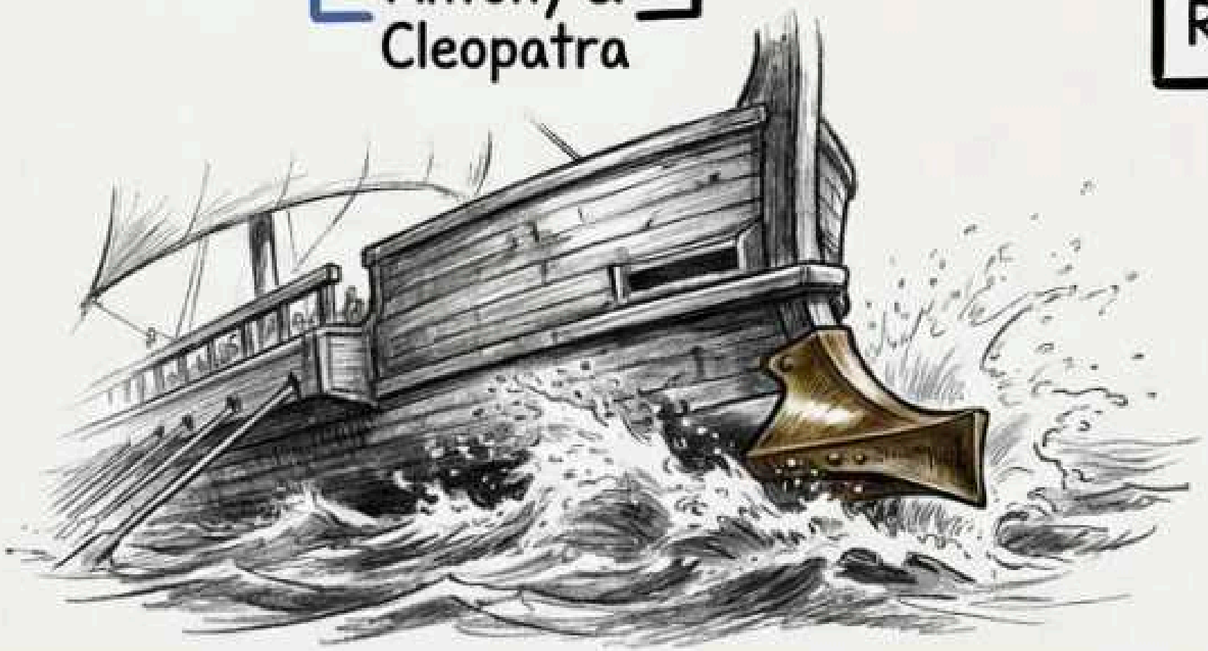
Triumvirate launches proscriptions (killing Cicero).

Octavian

Antony & Cleopatra

Naval battle of Actium (31 BCE)

Result (30 BCE): Octavian wins. Antony and Cleopatra die. Egypt becomes a Roman province.



# The Principate disguised absolute autocratic power behind republican traditions

¶ 5.13



Surface

## Above the Surface (The Claimed Reality)

- In 27 BCE, Octavian is named Augustus (revered).
- Claims to have restored the Republic.
- Keeps the Senate and traditional offices.
- Calls himself merely princeps (first citizen).

## Below the Surface (The Hidden Truth)

- Total control of the army.
- Direct control of the richest provinces.
- Holds ultimate decision-making power until his death in 14 CE.

# The Pax Romana was engineered through military restructuring and infrastructure

¶ 5.14

**Defense:** Standing professional army of ~25 legions, paid and given land/cash at discharge, stationed on frontiers.

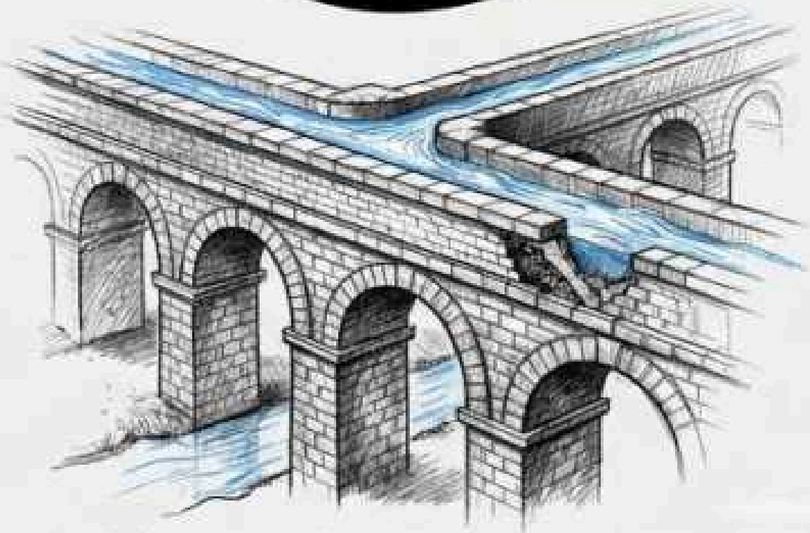
**Administration:** Reorganized provincial government and ordered regular censuses.

## Pax Romana

(Two centuries of relative peace)

**Urban Life:** Founded a permanent fire brigade for Rome.

**Infrastructure:** Built vast networks of roads and public works.



# Without a clear rule for succession, dynastic transitions often triggered chaos

¶ 5.15

**System Failure:** 69 CE (The Year of Four Emperors)——a year of devastating civil war.

## The Julio-Claudian Line

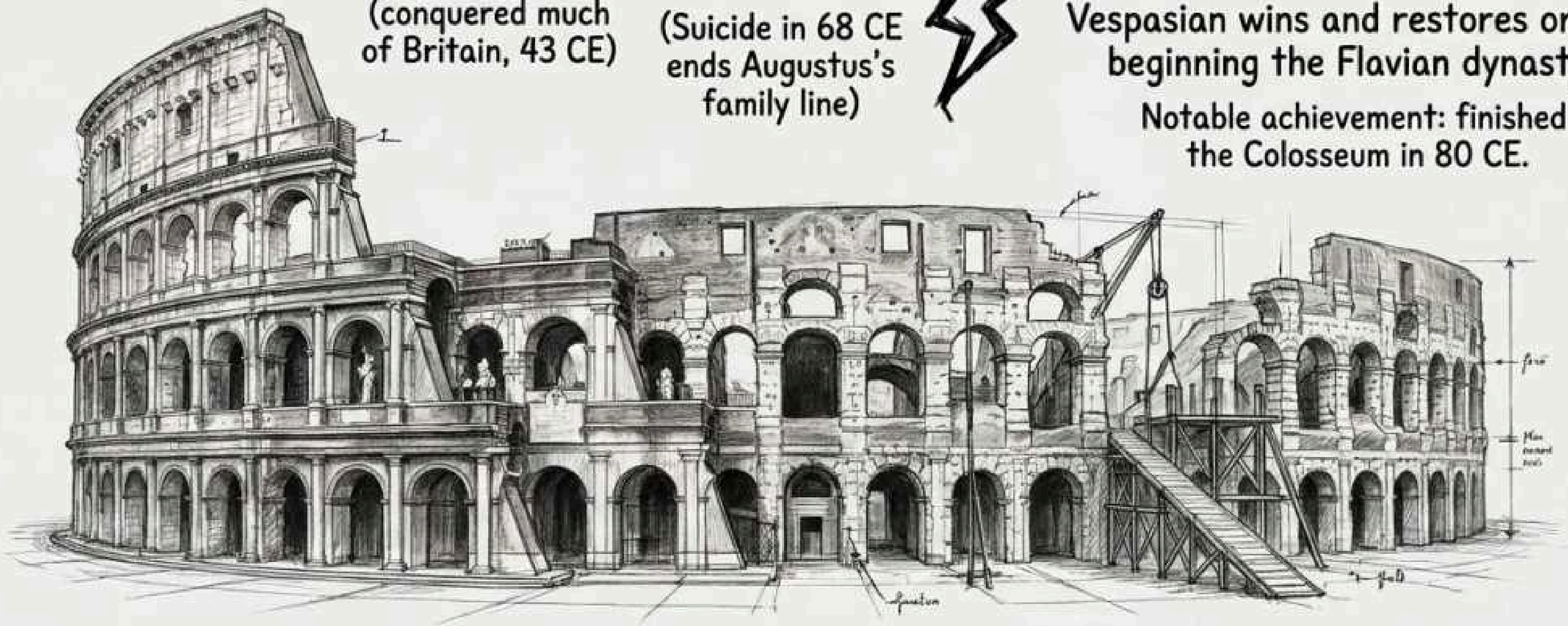
Tiberius → Caligula → Claudius → Nero

- **Claudius** (conquered much of Britain, 43 CE)
- **Nero** (Suicide in 68 CE ends Augustus's family line)

→ **The Flavian Reboot** →

Vespasian wins and restores order, beginning the Flavian dynasty.

Notable achievement: finished the Colosseum in 80 CE.



# The Good Emperors ruled effectively by adopting capable heirs instead of relying on blood

¶ 5.16

**Mechanism of Success:**
The deliberate practice of adopting highly capable successors.




117 CE: Trajan expands the empire to its absolute greatest territorial extent.

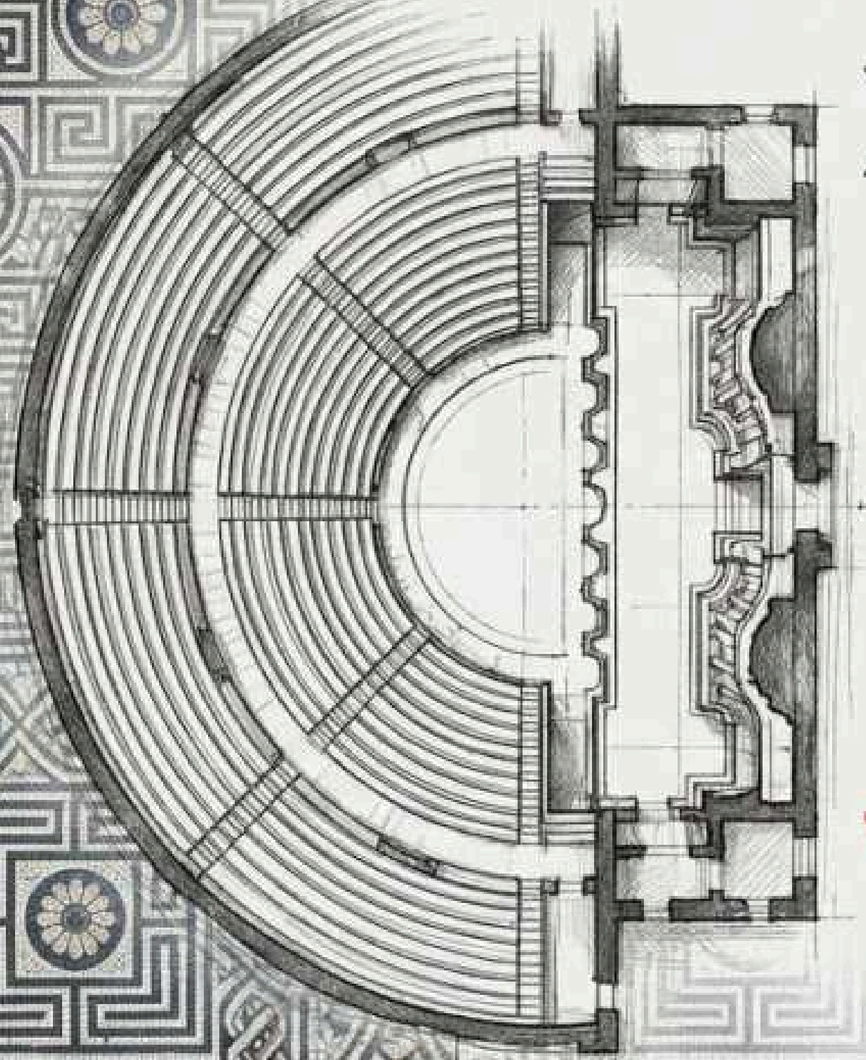
180 CE: Death of Marcus Aurelius, a devout Stoic who wrote the Meditations.

System breaks when Marcus Aurelius leaves the empire to his biological son, Commodus, who rules badly and is murdered.

The Decline

# The empire was a massive, bilingual network of highly developed urban centers

¶ 5.17



$$\sum \text{Pop}_{\text{Empire}} \approx 50\text{–}70 \times 10^6 \mid \text{Pop}_{\text{Rome}} \approx 1 \times 10^6$$

| WEST (Latin) | EAST (Greek) |
|---|---|

**Urban Sophistication**

- Aqueducts
- Baths
- Theaters
- Amphitheaters

**Legal Milestone (212 CE):** Emperor Caracalla grants citizenship to nearly all free inhabitants.

# Roman law developed into a sophisticated system defined by strict social hierarchies

¶ 5.18

**Features of Law**

- Trained jurists
- Written opinions
- Complex rules governing property, contracts, and family

(Note: These principles still shape global legal systems today)



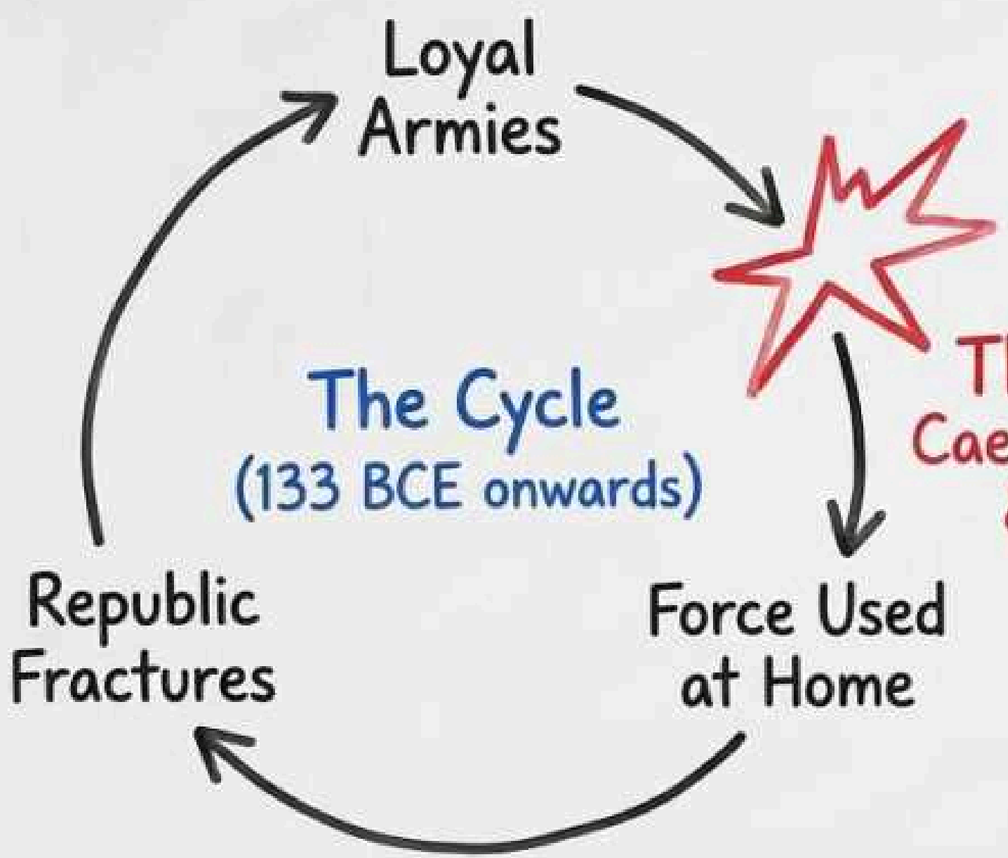
Legal rights were not universal but depended entirely on status:

Matrix of Rights (Inequality)

| | |
|---|---|
| Citizen vs. Subject | Free vs. Enslaved |
| Man vs. Woman | Rich vs. Poor |

# The Republic fell into a cycle of violence until autocracy imposed a lasting peace

¶ 5.19






**The Break:**
Caesar's victory & murder

**The New Line:**
Augustus creates the Principate

Two centuries of peace and prosperity (with the lingering danger of succession).



¶5.20

# Why might it have been wise for Augustus to keep the old titles and offices?

- Consider Caesar's fate: What happened to the man who openly accepted monarchical honors?
- Consider the public fatigue: What did ordinary Romans crave after a full century of civil war?



Power_Real (Military) + Titles_Old (Republic) = Survival