

Jews and Rome Assignment

The Jewish interaction with Rome in the first and second centuries plays a large role in our history as a people. We are used to viewing the Romans as the bad guys in this time period. But as historians we need to always try and look at both sides of the story. This does not excuse the deeds of people who have done wrong, but it can help us understand them.

For this assignment, you will put the two Jewish rebellions against Rome (the Great Revolt of 66-73 and the Bar Kokhba Rebellion) in their greater context. In a 2-3 page essay explain the two rebellions from the Roman perspective. Why did the Romans treat the Jews the way they did during these rebellions. Why do their actions make sense from a Roman perspective? You should use your class notes and the *Encyclopedia Britannica* entry below that offers an overview of the political history of Rome from this time period.

Encyclopedia Britannica

Like any great Roman magnate, Augustus owed it to his supporters and dependents to maintain the structure of power which they constituted together and which would normally pass from father to son. In accepting the heritage from Caesar, he had only done the right thing, and he was respected for it by his peers. None of them would have advised him later to dismantle what he had since added to it. When, for instance, he was away from Rome, rather than accepting a diminution in his prerogatives of administration, a senator as city prefect was deputed to represent him. Consequently, Augustus began thinking early about who should follow him. The soldiers' views on legitimacy reinforced his own natural desire to found a dynasty, but he had no son and was therefore obliged to select his successor. Death played havoc with his attempts to do so. His nephew Marcellus, his son-in-law Agrippa, his grandsons Gaius and Lucius (Julia's children by Agrippa), were groomed in turn; but they all predeceased him. Augustus, finally and reluctantly, chose a member of the republican nobility, his stepson Tiberius, a scion of the ultra-aristocratic Claudii. In ad 4 Augustus adopted Tiberius as his son and had tribunician power and probably proconsular imperium as well conferred upon him. This arrangement was confirmed in 13, and, when Augustus died the following year, Tiberius automatically became emperor.

Tiberius (ruled 14–37), during whose reign Christ was crucified, was a soldier and administrator of proved capability but of a reserved and moody temperament that engendered misunderstanding and unpopularity. Slander blamed him for the death in 19 of his nephew and heir apparent, the popular Germanicus; and, when informers (delatores), who functioned at Rome like public prosecutors, charged notables with treason, Tiberius was thought to encourage them. By concentrating the praetorian cohorts in a camp adjoining Rome, he increased the soldiers' scope for mischief-making without building any real security, and in 26 he left Rome

permanently for the island of Capreae (Capri), entrusting Rome to the care of the city prefect. Tiberius heeded the aged Augustus' advice and did not extend the empire. (The annexation of Cappadocia, a client kingdom, represented no departure from Augustan policy.) In general he took his duties seriously; however, by administering the empire from Capreae he offended the Senate and was never fully trusted, much less really liked. At his death he was not pronounced *divus*. His great-nephew, Germanicus' son Gaius, succeeded him.

Gaius (better known by his nickname, Caligula, meaning Little Boot) ruled from 37 to 41 with the absolutism of an Oriental monarch: his short reign was filled with reckless spending, callous murders, and humiliation of the Senate. Gaius' foreign policy was inept. Projected annexation proved abortive in Britain; it touched off heavy fighting in Mauretania. In Judaea and Alexandria, Gaius' contemptuous disregard of Jewish sentiment provoked near rebellion. When assassination ended his tyranny, the Senate contemplated restoration of the republic but was obliged by the Praetorian Guard to recognize Claudius, Germanicus' brother and therefore Gaius' uncle, as emperor.

Claudius I (ruled 41–54) went far beyond Augustus and Tiberius in centralizing government administration and, particularly, state finances in the imperial household. His freedmen secretaries consequently acquired great power; they were in effect directors of government bureaus. Claudius himself displayed much interest in the empire overseas; he enlarged it significantly, incorporating client kingdoms (Mauretania in 42; Lycia, 43; Thrace, 46) and, more important, annexing Britain. Conquest of Britain began in 43, Claudius himself participating in the campaign; the southeast was soon overrun, a colonia established at Camulodunum (Colchester) and a municipium at Verulamium (St. Albans), while Londinium (London) burgeoned into an important entrepôt. Claudius also promoted Romanization, especially in the western provinces, by liberally granting Roman citizenship, by founding coloniae, and by inducting provincials directly into the Senate—he became censor in 47 and added to the Senate men he wanted, bestowing appropriate quaestorian or praetorian rank upon them to spare the maturer ones among them the necessity of holding junior magistracies; lest existing senators take offense, he elevated some of them to patrician status (a form of patronage often used by later emperors). Claudius' provincial policies made the primacy of Italy less pronounced, although that was hardly his aim. In fact, he did much for Italy, improving its harbours, roads, and municipal administration and draining its marshy districts. The execution of many senators and equites, the insolence and venality of his freedmen, the excessive influence of his wives, and even his bodily infirmities combined to make him unpopular. Nevertheless, when he died (murdered probably by his fourth wife, Julia Agrippina, Augustus' great-granddaughter, who was impatient for the succession of the 16-year-old Nero, her son by an earlier marriage), he was pronounced *divus*.

Nero (ruled 54–68) left administration to capable advisers for a few years but then asserted himself as a vicious despot. He murdered successively his stepbrother Britannicus, his mother Julia Agrippina, his wife Octavia, and his tutor Seneca. He also executed many Christians, accusing them of starting the great fire of Rome in 64 (this is the first recorded Christian persecution). In Rome his reliance on Oriental favourites and his general misgovernment led to a conspiracy by Gaius Calpurnius Piso in 65, but it was suppressed, leading to yet more executions; the victims included the poet Lucan. The empire was not enlarged under this unwarlike emperor, but it was called upon to put down serious disorders. In Britain in 60–61 the rapacity and brutality of Roman officials provoked a furious uprising under Queen Boudicca; thousands were slaughtered, and Camulodunum, Vernulamium, and Londinium were destroyed. In the east a major military effort under Corbulo, Rome's foremost general, was required (62–65) to reestablish Roman prestige; a compromise settlement was reached, with the Romans accepting the Parthian nominee in Armenia and the Parthians recognizing him as Rome's client king. In 66, however, revolt flared in Judaea, fired by Roman cruelty and stupidity, Jewish fanaticism, and communal hatreds; the prefect of Egypt, Julius Alexander, prevented involvement of the Jews of the Diaspora. An army was sent to Judaea under Titus Flavius Vespasianus to restore order; but it had not completed its task when two provincial governors in the west rebelled against Nero—Julius Vindex in Gallia Lugdunensis and Sulpicius Galba in Hispania Tarraconensis. When the praetorians in Rome also renounced their allegiance, Nero lost his nerve and committed suicide. He brought the Julio-Claudian dynasty to an ignominious end by being the first emperor to suffer *damnatio memoriae*—his reign was officially stricken from the record by order of the Senate.

The Year of the Four Emperors

Nero's death ushered in the so-called year of the four emperors. The extinction of the Julio-Claudian imperial house robbed the soldiers of a focus for their allegiance, and civil war between the different armies ensued. The army of Upper Germany, after crushing Vindex, urged its commander, Verginius Rufus, to seize the purple for himself. But he elected to support Galba—scion of a republican patrician family claiming descent from Jupiter and Pasiphae—who was recognized as emperor by the Senate. However, the treasury, emptied by Nero's extravagance, imposed a stringent economy, and this bred unpopularity for Galba; his age (73) was also against him, and unrest grew. Early in January 69 the Rhineland armies acclaimed Aulus Vitellius, commander in Lower Germany; at Rome the praetorians preferred Marcus Salvius Otho, whom Galba had alienated by choosing a descendant of the old republican aristocracy for his successor. Otho promptly procured Galba's murder and obtained senatorial recognition; this ended the monopoly of the purple for the republican nobility.

Otho, however, lasted only three months; defeated at Bedriacum, near Cremona in northern Italy, by Vitellius' powerful Rhineland army, he committed suicide (April 69). The Senate thereupon recognized Vitellius; but the soldiers along the Danube and in the east supported Vespasianus, the

commander in Judaea. In a second battle near Bedriacum, the Rhineland troops were defeated in their turn, and on Vitellius' death soon afterward an accommodating Senate pronounced Vespasian emperor.

The Flavian emperors

On Dec. 22, 69, the Senate conferred all the imperial powers upon Vespasian en bloc with the famous Lex de Imperio Vespasiani ("Law Regulating Vespasian's authority"), and the Assembly ratified the Senate's action. This apparently was the first time that such a law was passed; a fragmentary copy of it is preserved on the Capitol in Rome.

Vespasian (ruled 69–79) did not originate from Rome or its aristocracy. His family came from the Sabine municipality Reate, and with his elevation the Italian bourgeoisie came into its own. He and his two sons, both of whom in turn succeeded him, constituted the Flavian dynasty (69–96). Vespasian faced the same difficult task as Augustus—the restoration of peace and stability. The disorders of 69 had taken troops away from the Rhine and Danube frontiers. Thereupon, the Danubian lands were raided by Sarmatians, a combination of tribes who had overwhelmed and replaced the Scythians, their distant kinsmen, in eastern Europe. The assailants were repelled without undue difficulty; but the Sarmatian Iazyges, now firmly in control of the region between the Tisza and Danube rivers, posed a threat for the future.

Developments in the Rhineland were more immediately serious. There in 69 a certain Civilis incited the Batavians serving as auxiliaries in the Roman army to rebel. Gallic tribes joined the movement, and the insurgents boldly overran all but two of the legionary camps along the Rhine. Vespasian sent his relative Petilius Cerealis to deal with the rebels, who, fortunately for Rome, were not united in their aims; by 70 Cerealis had restored order. That same year Vespasian's elder son, Titus, brought the bloody war in Judaea to its end by besieging, capturing, and destroying Jerusalem.

To rehabilitate the public finances, Vespasian introduced new imposts, including a poll tax on Jews, and practiced stringent economies. With the Senate he was courteous but firm. He allowed it little initiative but used it as a reservoir from which to obtain capable administrators. To that end he assumed the censorship and added senators on a larger scale than Claudius had done, especially from the municipalities of Italy and the western provinces. Already before 69 an aristocracy of service had arisen, and the provincialization of the Roman Senate had begun; thereafter this development made rapid headway. Besides the censorship, Vespasian also often held the consulship, usually with Titus as his colleague. His object presumably was to ensure that his own parvenu Flavian house outranked any other. In this he succeeded; the troops especially

were ready to accept the Flavians as the new imperial family. On Vespasian's death in 79, Titus, long groomed for the succession, became emperor and immediately had his father deified.

Titus (ruled 79–81) had a brief reign, marred by disasters (the volcanic eruption that buried Pompeii and Herculaneum and another great fire in Rome); but his attempts to alleviate the suffering and his general openhandedness won him such popularity that he was unhesitatingly deified after his early death.

Domitian (ruled 81–96), Titus' younger brother, had never been formally indicated for the succession; but the praetorians acclaimed him, and the Senate ratified their choice. Throughout his reign Domitian aimed at administrative efficiency, but his methods were high-handed. For him the Senate existed merely to supply imperial servants. He also used equites extensively, more than any previous emperor. He held the consulship repeatedly, was censor perpetuus from 85 on, and demanded other extravagant honours. On the whole, his efficiency promoted the welfare of the empire. Above all, he retained the allegiance of the troops. Although scornful of the Senate's dignity, he insisted on his own and mercilessly punished any act of disrespect, real or fancied, toward himself. He became even more suspicious and ruthless when Saturninus, commander in Upper Germany, attempted rebellion in 89. He crushed Saturninus; executions and confiscations ensued, and delatores flourished. The tyranny was particularly dangerous to senators, and it ended only with Domitian's assassination in 96. The Flavian dynasty, like the Julio-Claudian, ended with an emperor whose memory was officially damned.

The disorders in 69 were the cause of some military reforms. Under the Flavians, auxiliaries usually served far from their native hearths under officers of different nationality from themselves. At the same time, the tasks assigned to them came increasingly to resemble those performed by the legionaries. The latter grew less mobile, as camps with stone buildings came to be the rule; and it became common for detachments from a legion (vexillationes), rather than the entire legion, to be used for field operations. This army of a new type proved its mettle in Britain, where the advance halted by Boudicca's revolt was now resumed. Between 71 and 84 three able governors—Petilius Cerealis, Julius Frontinus, and Julius Agricola, the latter Tacitus' father-in-law—enlarged the province to include Wales and northern England; Agricola even reached the Scottish highlands before Domitian recalled him.

Along the Rhine, weaknesses revealed by Civilis' revolt were repaired. Vespasian crossed the river in 74 and annexed the Agri Decumates, the triangle of land between the Rhine, Danube, and Main rivers. To consolidate the position, he and Domitian after him penetrated the Neckar River valley and Taunus mountains, and fortifications began to take shape to the east of the Rhine, a military boundary complete with strongpoints, watchtowers, and, later, a continuous rampart of

earthworks and palisades. Once Saturninus' revolt in 89 had been suppressed, Domitian felt the situation along the Rhine sufficiently stable to warrant conversion of the military districts of Upper and Lower Germany into regular provinces and the transfer of some Rhineland troops to the Danube. To the north of this latter river, the Dacians had been organized into a strong kingdom, ruled by Decebalus and centring on modern Romania; in 85 they raided southward across the Danube, and in the next year they defeated the Roman punitive expedition. Domitian restored the situation in 88, but Saturninus' rebellion prevented him from following up his success. Domitian and Decebalus thereupon came to terms: Decebalus was to protect the lower Danube against Sarmatian attack, and Domitian was to pay him an annual subsidy in recompense. The Danubian frontier, however, remained disturbed, and Domitian wisely strengthened its garrisons; by the end of his reign it contained nine legions, as against the Rhineland's six, and Pannonia was soon to become the military centre of gravity of the empire.

The Flavians also took measures to strengthen the eastern frontier. In Asia Minor, Vespasian created a large "armed" province by amalgamating Cappadocia, Lesser Armenia, and Galatia; and the whole area was provided with a network of military roads. South of Asia Minor, Judaea was converted into an "armed" province by getting legionary troops; and two client kingdoms—Commagene and Transjordan—were annexed and added to Syria. Furthermore, the legionary camps seem now to have been established right on the Euphrates at the principal river crossings. This display of military strength kept the empire and Parthia at peace for many years.

The early Antonine emperors: Nerva and Trajan

Marcus Cocceius Nerva, an elderly senator of some distinction, was the choice of Domitian's assassins for emperor; and the Senate promptly recognized him. The soldiers, however, did so much more reluctantly, and, because the year 69 had revealed that emperors no longer needed to be Roman aristocrats and could be chosen in places other than Rome, their attitude imposed caution.

Nerva, who ruled from 96 to 98, adopted a generally lavish and liberal policy, but it failed to win the soldiers over completely, and he proved unable to save all Domitian's murderers from their vengeance. Unrest subsided only when, overlooking kinsmen of his own, he adopted an outstanding soldier, Marcus Ulpius Trajanus, who was governor of Upper Germany, as his successor. Nerva himself died a few months later.

Trajan (ruled 98–117) was the first and perhaps the only emperor to be adopted by a predecessor totally unrelated to him by either birth or marriage. He was also the first in a series of "good" rulers who succeeded one another by adoption and for most of the 2nd century provided the

empire with internal harmony and careful government; they are collectively, if somewhat loosely, called the Antonine emperors. More significantly still, Trajan, a Spaniard, was also the first princeps to come from the provinces; with the greater number of provincials now in the Senate, the elevation of one of them, sooner or later, was practically inevitable. Throughout his reign, Trajan generally observed constitutional practices. Mindful of the susceptibilities of the Senate, he regularly consulted and reported to it. Modest in his bearing, he did not claim ostentatious honours such as frequent consulships or numerous imperial salutations, and he mixed easily with senators on terms of cordial friendship. This reestablished mutual respect between princeps and Senate. Empire and liberty, in Tacitus' words, were reconciled, and the atmosphere of suspicion, intrigue, and terror surrounding the court in Domitian's day disappeared. Trajan endeared himself also to the populace at large with lavish building programs, gladiatorial games, and public distributions of money. Above all, he was popular with the armed forces; he was the soldier-emperor par excellence. Understandably, he received the title Optimus (Best), officially from 114 on (and unofficially for many years earlier).

Yet Trajan was a thoroughgoing autocrat who intervened without hesitation or scruple even in the senatorial sphere, whenever it seemed necessary. His aim was efficiency; his desire was to promote public welfare everywhere. He embellished Rome with splendid and substantial structures, and he showed his care for Italy by refurbishing and enlarging the harbours at Ostia, Centumcellae, and Ancona. He sent officials called *curatores* to Italian municipalities in financial difficulties and helped to rehabilitate them. He greatly expanded an ingenious charity scheme probably begun by Nerva: money was loaned to farmers on easy terms, and the low interest they paid went into a special fund for supporting indigent children. Nor did Trajan neglect Italy's highway network: he built a new road (Via Traiana) that soon replaced the Via Appia as the main thoroughfare between Beneventum and Brundisium.

Interest in Italy implied no neglect of the provinces. *Curatores* were also sent to them; to rescue Achaëa and Bithynia, senatorial provinces, from threatened bankruptcy, Trajan made them both temporarily imperial, sending special commissioners of his own to them. His correspondence with his appointee in Bithynia, the younger Pliny, has survived and reveals how conscientiously the emperor responded on even the smallest details. At the same time, it reveals how limited was access to the central government and, consequently, how great a latitude for independent decisions must be left to the governors who lacked some special claim on the emperor's attention. Trajan's day was too short to hear every speech of every delegation from the provinces, every recommendation to bestow favour or grant promotion, and every appeal to himself as supreme judiciary. To assist him, he had a "bureaucracy" of only a few hundred in Rome and a few more hundred serving in various capacities in the provinces—to direct the lives of some 60 million people. Clearly, most government must in fact rest in the hands of local aristocracies.

In the military sphere, Trajan's reign proved a most dynamic one. He decided to strengthen the dangerous Danube frontier by converting Dacia into a salient of Roman territory north of the river in order to dismember the Sarmatian tribes and remove the risk of large, hostile combinations to a safer distance. Bringing to bear a force of 100,000 men, he conquered Decebalus in two hard-fought wars (101–102; 105–106) and annexed Dacia, settling it with people from neighbouring parts of the empire. On the eastern frontier he planned a similar operation, evidently in the conviction, shared by many eminent Romans both before and after him, that only conquest could solve the Parthian problem. Possibly, too, he wished to contain the menace of the Sarmatian Alani in the Caspian region. In a preliminary move, the Nabataean kingdom of Arabia Petraea was annexed in 105–106. Then, in 114, Trajan assembled another large army, incorporated the client kingdom of Armenia, and invaded Parthia.

After spectacular victories in 115 and 116, he created additional provinces (Northern Mesopotamia, Assyria) and reached the Persian Gulf. But he had merely overrun Mesopotamia; he had not consolidated it, and, as his army passed, revolts broke out in its rear. The Jews of the Diaspora and others seized their chance to rebel, and before the end of 116 much of the Middle East besides Parthia was in arms (Cyrene, Egypt, Cyprus, Anatolia). Trajan proceeded resolutely to restore the situation, but death found him still in the East.

Before his last illness he had not formally indicated his successor. But high honours and important posts had been accorded his nearest male relative, Publius Aelius Hadrianus, the governor of Syria; and, according to Trajan's widow, Hadrian had actually been adopted by Trajan on his deathbed. Accordingly, both Senate and soldiers recognized him. Trajan's posthumous deification was never in doubt.

Hadrian (ruled 117–138), also a Spaniard, was an emperor of unusual versatility. Unlike Trajan, he was opposed to territorial expansion. Being himself in the East in 117, he renounced Trajan's conquests there immediately and contemplated evacuating Dacia as well. Furthermore, four of the consular generals particularly identified with Trajan's military ventures were arrested and executed "for conspiracy"; Hadrian claimed later that the Senate ordered their deaths against his wishes. The only heavy fighting during his generally peaceful reign occurred in Judaea—or Syria Palaestina, as it was thenceforth called—where Bar Kokhba led a furious, if futile, Jewish revolt (132–135) against Hadrian's conversion of Jerusalem into a Roman colony named Aelia Capitolina.

Instead of expansion by war, Hadrian sought carefully delimited but well-defended frontiers, with client states beyond them where possible. The frontiers themselves, when not natural barriers, were strongly fortified: in Britain, Hadrian's Wall, a complex of ditches, mounds, forts, and stone wall, stretched across the island from the Tyne to the Solway; Germany and Raetia had

a limes (fortified boundary) running between Mainz on the Rhine and Regensburg on the Danube. Within the frontiers the army was kept at full strength, mostly by local recruiting of legionaries and apparently of auxiliaries, too (so that Vespasian's system of having the latter serve far from their homelands gradually ceased). Moreover, the tendency for auxiliaries to be assimilated to legionaries continued; even the officers became less distinguishable, because equites now sometimes replaced senators in high posts in the legions. To keep his essentially sedentary army in constant readiness and at peak efficiency (no easy task), Hadrian carried out frequent personal inspections, spending about half his reign in the provinces (121–125; 128–134).

Hadrian also was responsible for significant developments on the civilian side. Under him, equites were no longer required to do military service as an essential step in their career, and many of them were employed in the imperial civil service, more even than under Domitian. By now the formative days of the civil service were over; its bureaucratic phase was beginning, and it offered those equites who had no military aspirations an attractive, purely civilian career. Formal titles now marked the different equestrian grades of dignity: a procurator was *vir egregius*; an ordinary prefect, *vir perfectissimus*; a praetorian prefect, *vir eminentissimus*, the latter title being obviously parallel to the designation *vir clarissimus* for a senator. Thenceforth, equites replaced freedmen in the imperial household and bureaus, and they even appeared in Hadrian's imperial council.

Hadrian also improved legal administration. He had his expert jurists codify the *edictum perpetuum* (the set of rules gradually elaborated by the praetors for the interpretation of the law). He also appointed four former consuls to serve as circuit judges in Italy. This brought Italy close to becoming a province; Hadrian's intent, however, was not to reduce the status of Italy but to make all parts of the empire important. For one part of his realm, he was exceptionally solicitous: he spent much time in Greece and lavishly embellished Athens.

Hadrian maintained good relations with but was never fully trusted by the Senate. His foreign policy seemed to be unheroic, his cosmopolitanism to be un-Roman, and his reforms to encroach on activities traditionally reserved for senators. Moreover, in his last two years he was sometimes capricious and tyrannous. Like Augustus, he had no son of his own and conducted a frustrating search for a successor. After executing his only male blood relative, his grandnephew, in 136, he adopted Lucius Ceionius Commodus, renaming him Lucius Aelius Caesar. The latter, however, died shortly afterward, whereupon Hadrian in 138 chose a wealthy but sonless senator, the 51-year-old Titus Aurelius Antoninus; but, evidently intent on founding a dynasty, he made Antoninus in his turn adopt two youths, 16 and 7 years old, respectively—they are known to history as Marcus Aurelius (the nephew of Antoninus' wife) and Lucius Verus (the son of Aelius Caesar).