The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World

The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church (1974): one deals solely with the persecution of the early Christians and the other reads merely "Persecution - and when we look under 'Persecution' we find only a very brief reference to the persecutions conducted by the early Christians (with hardly more than the remark, 'St. Augustine went so far as to demand corporal punishment for heretics and schismatics'), and we then jump straight to the Middle Ages! In an unpublished report delivered to the International Colloquium on Ecclesiastical History held at Oxford in September 1974 (a revised version of which I shall publish shortly), I tried to explain the earlier stages in the process of persecution by the Christian churches which 'made of organised Christianity, over more than a millennium and a half, a persecuting force without parallel in the world's history'.

* * * * *

I doubt if a better means could have been devised of distracting the victims of the class struggle from thinking about their own grievances and possible ways of remedying them than representing to them, as their ecclesiastical leaders did, that religious issues were infinitely more important than social, economic or political ones, and that it was heretics and schismatics (not to mention pagans, Manichaeans, Jews and other 'lesser breeds without the Law') upon whom their resentment could most profitably be concentrated. Of course I am not saying that leading ecclesiastics magnified the importance of theological questions with the deliberate aim of distracting the common herd from their temporal grievances; they themselves quite sincerely held that only adherence to the 'right' dogma and the 'right' sect could ensure salvation and escape from the frightful prospect of eternal damnation. But there is no doubt that the efforts of religious enthusiasm were as I have described them. Not many humble folk in the Christian Roman empire were likely to become obsessed with reforming the world of their day, or (for that matter) to achieve much unity among themselves, if they accepted what they were taught (as the vast majority did) and believed that life here and now is insignificant compared with the infinite stretches of eternity, and that their real enemies were those enemies of God and his Church who, if they were not suppressed, would endanger men's immortal souls and bring them to perdition. 'Heretics' and 'schismatics', as well as 'unbelievers', were an entirely new kind of internal enemy, invented by Christianity, upon whom the wrath of 'right-thinking people' could be concentrated, for in paganism the phenomena of 'heresy' and 'schism', as of 'unbelief', were inconceivable: there was no 'correct' dogma in which it was necessary to believe in order to avoid anathema in this world and damnation in the next, and to secure eternal life; and there was nothing remotely resembling a single, universal Church. We may reflect by contrast upon the good fortune of the mass of Greeks in the Classical period, who had no such beliefs instilled into them, to prevent them from recognising who their real internal enemies were, and to persuade them that democracy was a useless if not an impious aim, since 'the powers that be are ordained of God' (see the preceding section of this chapter).

VIII

The 'Decline and Fall' of
the Roman Empire: an Explanation

(i)

Intensified subjection and exploitation of the lower classes during the first three centuries of the Christian era

In this last chapter I shall again show how a Marxist analysis on class lines can help to explain, and not merely to describe, a historical process: in this case the disintegration of large portions of the Roman empire, part of a process which seemed to Gibbon 'the greatest, perhaps, and most awful scene in the history of mankind' (DFRE VII.325).

I have demonstrated in V iii above and Appendix IV below how Greek democracy, in the course of the class struggle on the political plane, was attacked with increasing success from the late fourth century B.C. onwards by the Greek propertied classes, their Macedonian overlords and eventually their Roman conquerors. As we have seen, democracy, when it worked, could play an important role by protecting the lower classes to some extent against exploitation and oppression by the powerful. Democracy still led a precarious existence in some places in the last century B.C., but during the first century of the Christian era it was gradually stifled and during the next century it virtually disappeared; certainly before the end of the third century it had, for all practical purposes, sunk without trace. (Democracy in the Latin West had never existed on anything like the same scale, and I know of no real sign of its existence after the first century.)

As we saw in IV iii above, the great age of slavery in the Roman world, especially in Italy and Sicily, was the last two centuries B.C.: the advent of the Principate in the last generation B.C. and the marked decrease in the number of wars producing large slave-hauls gradually brought about a new economic situation: slaves now had to be bred far more extensively than before, if their number was not to decline drastically; and for the reasons given in IV iii (§§ 6ff.) above this was bound to result in an attempt to increase the rate of exploitation of humble free men, in order to make up for a reduced return overall from slaves. An exploiting class, except in so far as it can be forced or persuaded (like some capitalist classes in the modern world) to abate its claims in order to facilitate its own survival (an eventuality which of course did not arise in the Graeco-Roman world), will use whatever means may lie to its hand to tighten the economic screws more effectively on the lower classes among the free population, it was obviously desirable to restrict an absolute minimum not merely their political but also their legal and constitutional rights and privileges. Until the second and even (to some small extent) the early third
The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World
century of the Christian era these rights and privileges might vary greatly: in the
greek world under roman rule, both in theory and (to a less extent) in practice,
according to whether a man was (a) a roman citizen (civis romanus), (b) a citizen
of a 'free' Greek city, a citizen ideae (occasionally also fieoes), which enjoyed
greatest powers of local jurisdiction than other municipalities, (c) a citizen of a
Greek city which was not technically 'free' (and was therefore more completely
subject to the control of the Roman provincial governor), or (d) an ordinary
provincial, like the great mass of the population (especially the peasants),
whose juridical rights were few and ill-defined and, as far as they existed at all,
were enjoyed largely on sufferance. Free men who were not roman citizens,
for example, were not usually tortured during the roman Republic or early
Principate (see e.g. Gurney, SSSLPE 143 and ff.). Pliny tortured only two
female slaves among the Pontic Christians he tried (see his Ep. X.96-8). But
I know of no binding general rule to this effect, except for roman citizens, and
I cannot see how any peregrini (non-Roman) who was torturd by order of a
Roman governor could have had any hope of redress, except through the
intervention of some influential patron.
By degrees, by a process - never yet, to my mind, adequately described -
which certainly began in practice in the first century of the Christian era and was
mainly 'institutionalised' and given explicit legal formulation in the second
century and the early third, especially in the Antonine period (A.D. 138-192),
the legal rights of the 'power classes' were gradually whittled away, and by the
Severan period (A.D. 193-235) had been reduced to a vanishing point. Possession
of local citizenship came to mean nothing, except for those who belonged to the
'second order': that is to say, the members of the city Councils and their families
(cf. V in above and Section ii of this chapter), who gradually became a hereditary
local governing class. It was possession of the Roman citizenship which had
long been the source of the most important juridical privileges, but the citizen-
ship came to mean less and less, as a new set of social and juridical distinctions
which, as I shall show, were essentially, in the main, class distinctions -
gradually developed, cutting right across that between civis and peregrini, so to
speak. By the so-called Constitution Antonini (the CA for short) of the emperor
we usually call Caracalla or Caracallus (his real name was M. Aurelius Anto-
нимus), the traditional (and almost certainly the actual) date of which is A.D.
212., the citizenship was extended to all, or virtually all, the free inhabitants of
the empire. But this fact is very much less remarkable than it appears at first
sight. The only contemporary expression of opinion about the purpose of the
CA which survives is that of a leading Graeco-Roman historian who lived
through the reign of Caracalla as a senator and consider and was in almost as
good a position as anyone to understand imperial policy. Dio Cassius (LXVII
[LXXVIII] ix, esp. 5). Dio says explicitly that Caracalla's purpose was to
increase his revenue by making former peregrini liable to certain taxes paid only
by Roman citizens, the most important of which was the 5 per cent inheritance
tax (impositio heaedationis). Dio of course detested Caracalla, and some historians
have felt able to reject the, alleged motive for the CA. I myself would not care
to deny that a desire to raise additional revenue is likely to have played a major part
in the emperor's mind, especially if we accept, as I think we must, the opinion of
J. F. Gilliam that the inheritance tax affected estates of much lower value than

VIII. The 'decline and fall': an explanation (i)
has generally been assumed and applied even to quite small fortunes, so that a
very large number of people would have been subjected to it as a result of the
CA. Whatever the unbalanced Caracalla's motives may have been for issuing his
either I would say that by far the most important fact in the background, which
made the CA both possible and remarkable, was precisely the 'new set of
social and juridical distinctions'; I am just about to describe, which by now had
replaced the distinction between civis and peregrinis for most important pur-
poses and had made its continued existence unnecessary and irrelevant - a point
to which I shall return presently.

The 'new set of social and juridical distinctions' is not easy to describe in a few
sentences, and I know of no satisfactory and comprehensive treatment of it.
although there have been very useful studies by Cardinal (ADCII) and Gurney
(SSSLPE and LPERE). Here I can do no more than give a brief and over-
simplified summary, in numbered paragraphs, to make cross-reference easier.

1. (a) The value to a 'Greek' of possessing the Roman citizenship in the early
Principate is admirably illustrated by the story (in Acts XXII.26 to XXVI.32; cf.
XVI.37-9) of St. Paul, a Jew of good education (XXII.3) who must have
belonged to a fairly well-to-do family and could claim (XVI.39) to possess not
only the Roman citizenship but also that of Tarsus, the principal Greek city of
Cilicia in southern Asia Minor - a privilege not enjoyed, incidentally, by the
linen-workers (linenai) of that city, as we know from Dio Chrysostom
(XXXIV.21-3; cf. Appendix IV § 38 below). Now the technical legal conse-
quences which should be drawn from the story of Paul's appeal to Caesar are
by no means certain in all respects, and Gurney has recently argued that Paul,
the Procurator of Judaea, was not bound to send Paul to Rome. But it would be
a mistake for us to concentrate only on Paul's appeal to be tried by the emperor.
More important is the fact that at an earlier stage in the proceedings it was
beyond question Paul's insistence upon his Roman citizenship which first
rescued him from an 'inquitious' flogging in the barracks at Jerusalem and
subsequently induced the Emperor there, the military tribune Claudius
Lyssas, to take elaborate precautions to send him to Caesarea, the provincial
capital, a little over 100 kilometres away, under strong military escort, thereby
saving him from being murdered by a band of Jewish ex-servitors (see Acts
XXII.25-9; XXII.40, 12-21, 23-33, esp. XXII.25-29, XXIII.23-7). Whether or
not Festus was legally bound to allow Paul's appeal to the emperor, the facts
suggest that he did allow it; and even Gurney is prepared to agree that Paul's citizenship
played a part in making up his mind (SSSLPE 76). If no such appeal had been
possible, Paul would doubtless have been tried by Festus at Jerusalem (Acts
XXXV.9,20), necessarily with a consiliaetium of leading Jews who would have been
strongly prejudiced against him - if indeed he was not murdered on the road
from Caesarea to Jerusalem, as we are told the Jews had planned (Acts XXV.1-4).
Had he not been able to claim Roman citizenship, then, Paul would never even
have reached Caesarea and the provincial governor's court; or if he had, he
would have been finished off by the Jews fairly easily. I should perhaps add that I
in general accept the story in Acts, even if some of it, which can only come
ultimately from Paul himself, is almost too good to be true. Most of us, when
first arrested as Paul was at Jerusalem, would have shouted out, at an early stage
The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World

in the proceedings, "You can't do this to me. I'm a Roman citizen." Paul waits until the last possible moment, when the centurion in charge of the flogging party is just about to give the order to begin; and he is studiously polite and detached.

(b) Almost at the end of the Antonine period, in the early 180s in fact, the peasant of the Saltus Burunitanus in the province of Africa, at the modern Souk in Tunisia, fought himself into very humble terms as "miserrimi homines," and "hominis rustici tenues," could feel entitled to complain to the emperor because the head lessee of the imperial estate on which they were tenants (colonii) had had some of them flogged, "even though they were Roman citizens." (I suspect that flogging administered by a magistrate, rather than a private individual, might by then have been something the peasant would have had to take, so to speak, more or less in his stride.) And even in the Severan period Ulpian, in a famous passage included in the Digest (XLVIII vii, cf. 8 and Paulus, Sent. V. xxxi.1), could speak of the Lex Julia de vi publica (of Augustus) as forbidding the execution, flogging or torture of any Roman citizen adversus provocatorem — that is to say, in defiance of any right of appeal to which the person in question might be entitled.

(c) It is an exaggeration when Garstey, in the penultimate paragraph of his book (SSLPR 279-80), asserts that "at no stage in the period under survey was citizenship as such a source of privilege." (The period in question is from the age of Cicero to the age of the Severan Emperors; that is, from the mid-first century B.C. to the early third century A.D. SSLPR 3.) There is an important element of truth in what Garstey goes on to say that citizenship merely "bestowed certain formal rights on its holders as full members of the Roman community, but provided no guarantee of their exercise." There was no cast-iron guarantee, certainly. Citizens of even the most advanced modern states are sometimes the victims of illegality and injustice. But the example of St. Paul is sufficient to prove that citizenship could be a 'source of privilege' of the very greatest possible value, which might indeed make all the difference between life and death. And it is interesting to remember here that Greek cities - Rhodes and Cyzicus in particular - could be deprived of their 'free' status for having taken it upon themselves to execute Roman citizens. 11 As we shall see, Garstey minimizes the changes (mainly during the second century) which substituted for the purely political qualifications of the citizenship, as a source of privilege, a social qualification which was ultimately dependent very largely upon economic position - upon class.

2. (a) For all practical purposes the constitutional right to which an inhabitant of the Graeco-Roman world was entitled by age was the right to be a Roman citizen, but, broadly speaking, on whether he was a member of what I shall call 'the privileged groups': namely, senatorial, equestrian and curial families, 12 veterans and their children, and (for some purposes) serving soldiers. 13

(b) The many relevant legal texts from the second and early third centuries sometimes give privileges to undefined groups, designated by a variety of terms, the most common of which is honetiores (often opposed to humiliores), although there are many others, not merely hominates loco natus, in

The 'decline and fall': an explanation (I)

equinique poenitum, in aliquo dignitatem poenitunt, hominates, quia aliquo gradus est (all equivalents which show the close connection between privileged status and official rank), but also splenditiora poenitentia, maioris poenitentia, aliorum. The emancipatur may also be a humiliata poenitentia, humiliata loci, humiliata loco postes, quia humiliata loco est, quia secundus gradus est, plebians (particularly common), servilius, tenens, and (in the Later Emperors) inferior poenitentia, minori poenitentia, even postes poenitentia. (My lists are not intended to be exhaustive.) The Roman lawyers, curiously enough, were

carey of giving precise definitions: as Javolenus Priscus put it, 'Every definition is dangerous in civil law' (Dig. I. lxvii.202). But in this case there was a perfectly good reason why they preferred to leave their terms undefined: all these texts relate to cases involving judicial procedure, where it was very desirable to leave it to the individual judge to determine who was and who was not included. (This has been well brought out by Cardascia, ADCH 335.) Would the brother of a man who had just entered the Senate, the wife of the Praetorian Prefect, or the bosom friend of the Prefect of Egypt be considered a humiliatus, just because he or she did not happen to have the technical qualification for membership of a privileged group? I cannot believe it. 14 Excited rank could be expected to shed its lustre upon a man's relatives: a papyros of the early third century (P. Gen. 1) we find a petty official in Egypt advising some other such officials to be very careful how they behave towards the relatives of a man belonging to only the third and lowest equestrian grade (a vir egregius) who happened to enjoy the confidence of the Emperor Caracalla (cf. now Miller, ERF 14 and 32).

3. Again oversimplifying, I shall now summarise the legal, constitutional differences which developed mainly during the second century (and certainly before A.D. 212) between the privileged groups and those below them. The latter I can call without hesitation 'the lower classes': virtually all of them would fall outside what I have defined as 'the propertied class' (see III.1) and those who only include virtually all those free men and women who were not members of that class. I have avoided speaking of the privileged groups as 'the upper classes' or 'the propertied classes', because they included for many purposes veterans and even serving soldiers, who might be men of modest fortune; but I would insist that veterans (and soldiers) were given the privileges they received because of the unique importance of the army (which of course included a large part of the imperial civil service) 15 in the life of the empire and the necessity of turning discharged soldiers into contented property-owners: failure to do this had been a major cause of the downfall of the Republic (see VI. v above). The privileges of veterans were explicitly patterned on those of

decurions; as the late Severan jurist Marcianus says, 'The same honour is attributed
to veterans and the children of veterans as to decurions' (Dig. XVI. xlix. 4).

Now the decurions (see Section ii of this chapter) were always, broadly speaking, the class of principal local landowners who were not homonoi (not members of the senatorial and equestrian aristocracy), and as time went on they became ever more nearly identical with that class. I would emphasise, therefore, that the 'privileged groups', apart from veterans and soldiers, had by the third century become almost identical (at least 90 per cent and perhaps even more nearly identical) with my 'propertied class', just as the non-privileged are virtually my 'lower classes', below the propertied class. Isolated exceptions such as imperial freedmen are too few to damage my case, especially when we remember that being a freedman is strictly a one-generation status (see III.v above) — and anyway some of these freedmen received equestrian status, and one or two even quasi-senatorial rank.  

(a) The most conspicuous and best attested difference between our two groups (often in this connection referred to as homonoi and humiles) is the true dual penalty system, in which the privileged groups received a lighter penalty than the lower classes; decapitation, for instance, instead of one of the severest supplied (cruciﬁxion, burning to death, or the beasts), and general exemption from condemnation to the mines or forced labour (opus publicum), often inﬂicted on the lower classes. There is an interesting controversy between Cardasaca and Garsley about the emergence of the dual penalty system from a matter of practice, according to the discretion of judges, to deﬁnite rules of ﬁxed law; here Cardasaca's review of Garsley's book seems to me decisive.  

In the Antonine and Severan age, rather than in the ﬁrst century, I must omit to mention one statement in the Digest, by the Severan lawyer Aemilius Macer, that slaves were punished 'according to the example of the humiles' (exemplum humilium, Dig. XVII. xxx. 10, 8). As Garsley aptly comments, 'The sequence might have been reversed. When one examines the forms of punishment used on humiles, one is struck by the connection with, and the derivation from, typical slave punishments' (SSLPRE 127).

(b) Flogging, during the Republic and early Principate, was not supposed to be used on citizens, whose right of appeal against it, given by a law of the early second century B.C., was conﬁrmed by the Lex Julia de ﬁsica publica of Augustus.  

Probably humble citizens were often subjected to flogging by over-zealous magistrates during the investigation of cases – compare the modern 'third degree'. But as we saw above, St. Paul was immediately rescued from an inquisitorial flogging by his assertion of citizenship, and as late as the 180s humble African peasants could formally protest against the flogging – by their landlord, as we saw in 1(b) above – of those of their number who were citizens. The whole situation had changed drastically, however, by the early third century. The precise chronology is far from clear, but no one can deny that well before the end of the second century, citizens belonging to the lower classes could legally and properly be flogged for a wide variety of reasons, while their superiors were given legal exemption. (The most interesting texts are perhaps C.II.xi.5, of A.D. 198, and Caligularis in Dig. XVII by 26th century, showing that the exemption of decurions was a central fact.) Interest in this process has too often concentrated on the exemptions, to which our evidence mainly relates, and as a result the really important development, which is the introduction of beating for the great mass of humble citizens, has tended not to receive much attention. Unfortunately, I do not think it is possible to decide precisely how long before the end of the second century the flogging of humble citizens became fully 'institutionalised'. (As I shall show in Section ii of this chapter, decurions in the fourth century lost their general immunity from flogging.)

(c) 'Torture traditionally was reserved for slaves, but free men of low rank were not immune in the second and third centuries', and 'Torture of homonoi was not permitted in the Antonine and Severan periods'. These perfectly correct statements by Garsley are characteristic of what is to be found in most writings on the subject. They conceal the fact that a standing charge took place in the second century, very probably in the Antonine period. A curiously limited constitution of Marcus Aurelius which excused certain descendants of the two highest grades of the equestrian order (equester and perfectissimi) from the punishments of beating or from torture (plebeiorum ponsis vel perfectissimorum, C.IX.x.11, pr.) has more than once been discussed without the really remarkable thing about it being stressed: that it shows that most Roman citizens had now come to be officially regarded as legally liable to torture. Whether it was ever considered necessary to give legal exemption to such exalted creatures as equester and perfectissimi themselves may well be doubted; but, since the privileges of the equestrian order were more strictly personal than those of senators, Marcus obviously thought it desirable to give speciﬁc exemption to members of other families within certain degrees.  

(Compare with 1. I have noted above on the lustrum shed by exalted rank upon a man's relatives. The circle of relatives automatically entitled to such beneﬁt might well need formal legal deﬁnition on occasion; no doubt a emperor could always extend it.) As with flogging, so with torture: the exemption of decurions was the essential thing; it may always have been the practice, and a rescript of Antoninus Pius shows that by the time of that emperor (138-61) it had become settled law (Dig. I.xi.14; C.XLVIII.xxvii.5.1 = 10, pr.; 106; and, for the Severan period, Ulpian's statement quoted in C.IX.x.11, 1) This equally shows that there had been an important change in legal practice in the second century, and that there was now nothing legally objectionable in the torture of lower-class citizens. Phiny, when persecuting the Christians in c. 113, had tortured only slaves (see above), and we can believe that many officials still preferred not to torture free men of any sort if they could avoid it. But the application of torture in court to accused persons was soon extended even to witnesses of humble condition; and by about the end of the third century the lawyer Arcadius Charisius, in his book Omnisenses cited in the Digest (XXII.c.21, 2), could actually advise that 'if the nature of the case is such that we are obliged to admit a harenaus or some such person [vel simili persona] as a witness, no credence ought to be attached to his testimony without the inﬂiction of torture [sine tormenti].' (A harenaius, a strictly a man who took part in combats in the amphitheatre, was regarded with special contempt by the Roman upper classes; but the words 'vel simili persona' might, I think, be held to apply to almost any propertyless individual who earned a precarious living at the bottom of the social ladder.) There is a tendency to prohibit the torture of slaves in order to procure evidence against their owners, former owners and even possessors, and the near relatives of such people (see Thuccland.
The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World

RSL 86-91, esp. 88-9). This, however, is due to concern for slaveowners, not slaves. As Cicero had put it, in his speech for Milo, torturing a slave to get evidence against his master is "more ignominious to the master than death itself", domini morte (pro Milone 59). I should perhaps add that in cases of treason, magnates, all rules relating to exemption from torture could go by the board, as indeed did most other rules.

(d) In various other ways members of the lower classes who were charged with crimes were at a disadvantage compared with the propertied classes: for example, they would find it much harder to escape imprisonment pending trial - to get out on bail, as we might say [see esp. Dig. XL VIII iii. 1, 3]. And ancient prison conditions could be very unpleasant for humble people: see section ii of this chapter, ad fin.

(e) More important is the fact that evidence given in court by members of the lower classes, whether in criminal or civil cases, was accorded less weight than that of their social superiors. The key text is a passage from Callistrate in the Digest (XXII v. 3 pr.), explaining the principles on which evidence is to be evaluated: of the criteria mentioned the first concerns the witness' social status (condicio) and is 'whether he is a deacon or a commune' (decus aut plebeius), and the third is 'whether he is rich or poor' (homines vel egens). Callistrate proceeds to quote a series of rescripts of Hadrian, some of which illustrate the kind of discrimination he records (ibid. 3.1-2.6). The satirist Juvenal, writing in the early second century, had complained that at Rome a witness was valued according to his wealth (his annos); the number of his slaves, the extent of his land, the size and quality of his dinner-service. His character and behaviour his more came last: he received credit in proportion to the number of coins in his cash-box (Sat. II. 18-10.4. ending 'quantum quisque sua nummorum servat in arca. Tantum habet et fide'). This was closer to the reality, even in Juvenal's day, than I fancy most modern readers of Juvenal appreciate, and by the time of Callistrate (c. 200) it was almost the literal truth.

(f) In the field of private law, we find that torts committed against a member of the upper classes by a member of the lower classes are regarded as more serious: such a wrong may become automatically an actio iunior, to the assessment of damages for which special rules applied. And the actio delicti, or de dolo male, the action for fraud, might be refused to members of the lower classes against at any rate particularly distinguished members of the upper classes. This, however, was of much less importance to a humble plaintiff than one might suppose from reading the recent accounts of Cardascia and Garsney, who fail to quote the continuation of Dig. IV iii. 11.1, showing that the injured man could still have a remedy by bringing an action in factum, not involving an accusation of fraud. (Such a plaintiff would lose nothing in most cases; but the great man would suffer less if he lost the action, since he would not have the same liability to infama.)

We need not be surprised to find evidence from the Greek West as well as the Latin West that when distributions of money (spoliatae, in Latin) or food were made in cities by gracious benefactors, deceptions often received more than ordinary citizens, but this of course is a social and not a legal fact.

VIII. The 'decline and fall': an explanation (i)

The very summary and simplified account I have given of some of the principal ways in which the lower classes of the Graeco-Roman world were placed in most respects increasingly - at a disadvantage compared with their social superiors, during the first two or three centuries of the Christian era (the changes coming about principally in the second and early third centuries), will at least have shown that the propertied classes now found it easier than ever before to exploit those humble free men upon whose labour they were becoming more directly dependent for their surplus, now that slavery was somewhat less fruitful than in the last two centuries B.C. It seems that the deterioration in the legal position of the lower class was not the result of a deliberate and conscious effort by the propertied class to subject those beneath them to a higher degree of exploitation, with less chance of meeting effective resistance; but that must certainly have been the effect of the whole process. My own inadequate account can be supplemented by Garsney's book (SNSR6), a very rich source of information and showing awareness of many of the social evils in the Graeco-Roman world over which too many ancient historians have felt able to pass lightly. If I have expressed disagreement with Garsney on one or two specific points, it must not be taken as a disparagement of his very interesting and valuable book. I should also like to recommend at this point an informative article by Garsney which should be easily intelligible to those unacquainted with Roman history and even with Latin: 'Why Penal Laws become Harsh: The Roman Case', in Natural Law Forum 13 (Indiana, U.S.A., 1968) 141-62.

I hope it is already clear that what I have been describing in this section is essentially the replacement of one set of juridical distinctions, largely unrelated to class, by another set which was directly so related. The earlier set had no direct connection with class in my sense: its categories were purely political, with citizenship as the determining element. But although such things as execution, flagging, torture, criminal punishment in general, the evaluation of evidence, and the treatment of individuals by the authorities might vary greatly in practice according to class position, as Garsney's book seems to me to have demonstrated, in constitutional theory they differed according to the possession or the lack of citizenship alone. Now from the early Principate onwards, through the granting of the citizenship to pictetius who had completed their full twenty-five years' service in the non-citizen auxiliary regiments or the fleet (down to A.D. 140, with their children), the possession of citizenship came to correspond less and less closely with membership of the upper classes. And from Caesar's time Roman citizenship spread widely through the foundation outside Italy of citizen colonies and Roman municipalities, although much more so in the West than in the Greek world. A recent writer has remarked, with greater shrewdness than perhaps he realised, that in the West wholesale extension of the citizenship 'must have led to some practical limitation of a right which would have become a nuisance when universalised'. The new set of distinctions corresponded very closely with class position, as we have seen, except for soldiers and veterans, who had to be placed collectively among the privileged groups for many purposes because of their great importance in maintaining the whole fabric of the empire, against potential internal rebellion and discontent as well as against
external enemies. Eventually, by 212, citizenship was perceived to be an un
ecessary category, and we may see its sudden general extension in 212 equally as its disappearance, when it had become superfluous: the privileged classes (with soldiers and ex-soldiers) now had all the constitutional privileges they needed, quite apart from the citizenship, partly by tradition but mainly by specific imperial enactments, only some of which can be identified today.

The whole process is an interesting illustration of the way in which class can assert itself against purely juridical categories which do not correspond with its realities. Of course, the important differences that existed at the latest by the Severan period (193-235) between the constitutional rights of the upper and lower classes reflected in part the differences in the practical treatment of the two groups in earlier generations; but they were now the subject of settled law and were much sharper, and they had to be strictly observed by provincial governors and other magistrates. To understand this, we have only to ask ourselves what would have happened to St. Paul had he lived, say, a hundred and fifty years later than he did, at about the time of the C.A. Unless he could have claimed (as I am sure he could not) to be a member of the city Council of Tarus, a deacon, he would have been subjected to an unpleasant Inquisitorial flogging, and he would probably have been finished off by the Jews soon afterwards. He might or might not have got as far as the governor's court, but he would certainly not have been able to appeal successfully to the trial by the emperor in Rome, and the odds would have been heavily against him at a trial in Blackwall, where the governor would have had a coalition of leading Jews at his elbow (see n. 9 again). It is naturally impossible for me to prove the discreditation in the position of humble citizens — and indeed of poor free men in general — during the first two centuries of the Christian era was due to the deliberate desire of the upper classes to reduce their legal rights, with the aim of making them less able to defend themselves against increased exploitation; but that was, I suggest, the direct effect of the changes I have described. Similarly, the exploitation of the humber citizens of Greek cities must have been significantly facilitated by the process I have described in VIII in above: the gradual extinction of the remaining democratic factors of the city constitutions.

I would invite comparison of the picture I have been drawing with that given by Finley. AE 84 ff., who notes the 'decline of slavery' and adds that this requires explanation' (cf. VIII in n. 18 above). Accepting the hypothesis that the employers of labour in the later Empire were not making the efforts needed to maintain a full complement of slave labour, he produces his explanation for their behaviour, which is a structural transformation within the society as a whole. He now comes very near to saying something valuable, when he adds that 'the key lies not with the slaves but with the free poor', and he adds that he believes the elements can be 'punctuated'. Also, all we get is a 'trend', visible from the beginning of the Principate, to a return to a more "archaic" structure, in which orders again became functionally significant, in which a broader spectrum of statuses gradually replaced the classical blocking into free men and slaves — roughly, that is to say, the process which I have been at pains to describe in this section, but conceived from a superficial point of view, in terms of status, serving to conceal its mainspring and its essential character. What I see as primarily a development that would facilitate exploitation is to Finley 'a cumulative depression in the status of the lower classes among the free citizens' (AE 87, my italics). But how does the 'trend' described by Finley explain the changeover (described in VIII above) from slave production to what I would call mainly serf production? (Finley prefers to speak of "tied tenants", but see III vi and IV v. above) The 'explanation' should be precisely the other way round: it was because slavery was not now producing as great a surplus as it did in Rome's palmy days that the privileged classes needed to put less pressure on the free poor. On p. 93 Finley comes very near to getting it right. But 'exploitation' is not a concept he is prepared to use for him, "exploitation" and "imperialism" are, in the end, too broad categories of analysis. Like "state", they require specification (AE 87) — which they never receive from him. But the historian who debars himself from using exploitation and imperialism as categories of analysis will hardly make more sense of the ancient than of the modern world.

* * * * * * *

To conclude this section I shall briefly review the much-discussed theory of the "decline and fall" of the Roman empire advanced by Rostovtzeff in his great work, first published in 1926. The Social and Economic histories of the Roman Empire, one of the few books on ancient history which the historian of some other period, if not the 'general reader', will not only have heard of but may actually have read, or at least dipped into, and which every Greek and Roman historian consults often. It was somewhat altered for the better in translation into German and Italian, and it was re-edited in a much-improved second English edition by P. M. Fasson in 1957 (SEHRE). As is well known, Rostovtzeff refused to give a complete answer, let alone a single answer, to the question why the Roman empire "declined and fell", contesting himself with a summary criticism of certain theories which he thought false or inadequate (SEHRE I, 332-41). I shall comment presently on an interesting remark in his very last paragraph. At this point I wish to mention the interpretation which Rostovtzeff himself offers of the period in which the "decline" first became apparent: roughly from the death of Marcus Aurelius to the accession of Diocletian, A.D. 180-284 (I, 391-351, cf. 332-41). Rostovtzeff recognises that the civilisation of the Roman empire was essentially urban (the city says, was 'urbanised to excess', I, 346), and that the privileged upper class of the cities - "natives and freedmen", as Rostovtzeff actually calls them (I, 389, cf. 351) - lived in such luxury off the backs of the working population, urban and rural, above all the peasantry who formed the bulk of that population (cf. I, iii and IV v. above). So far, many Roman historians would find nothing to quarrel with. But Rostovtzeff, who had himself experienced the Russian revolution, went on to find the explanation of the upheavals of the third century in a deliberate and class-conscious attack by the exploited peasantry, using as its spearhead that large army which was recruited mainly from its ranks, upon the 'old' or "classical" (as Rostovtzeff calls it) - a purely destructive attack, which would bring no lasting gain to the semi-barbarous victors (cf. e.g., especially 491-501). This theory has been taken on trust by many who do not know the sources for the.
Middle and later Roman empire at first hand, and has often been cited with approval, although rarely (as Rostovtzeff himself realized; see 1,494-5) by Roman historians. In fact, none of the evidence cited by Rostovtzeff supports his theory. Its principal and fatal defect has been exposed several times, notably in a review and an article by Norman Baynes, published in 1929 and 1943 respectively.16 The contemporary sources reveal that the soldiers, far from being regarded by the peasants as their representatives, or even as allies, were actually their constant terror. (This, indeed, Rostovtzeff himself realized, see his SEHRE 1, 1487 for a passage beginning, ‘The instruments of oppression and exactation were soldiers ... They were a real terror to the population’.) Rostovtzeff speaks again and again of ‘classes’, even (in 1,503) of the ‘terrible class war’ of the third century — a serious misconception, as I shall explain in Section III of this chapter. Yet although his analysis of the class forces of the Roman empire sometimes verges on one which would be acceptable to many Marxists, he himself always repudiated Marxism, and his concept of ‘classes’ and their struggle is erratic and wavering. (I find it extraordinary that even so good a historian as Baynes should have regarded Rostovtzeff as a kind of Marxist.)17

We must purge his theory about the third-century crisis of its eccentric features and strip it down, so to speak, to what is fundamental and true in it: that there was massive exploitation by an urban property class of what Rostovtzeff himself twice refers to as ‘the working-class’ of the empire: the rural population (free or otherwise) and the artisans, retail-traders and slaves in the towns (see 1,495, 1,496). When we develop this, we begin to see the reasons for the renewed decline in the Later Empire: a period in which Rostovtzeff seems to have been less familiar, after the heroic revival of the age of Diocletian and Constantine. The Later Empire, especially in the West, was rather less a specifically urban civilization, but it was if anything even more a regime in which the vast majority were exploited to the very limit for the benefit of a few. (Rostovtzeff seems to have realized this; see SEHRE 1, 1075-7.) Among those few, the indiscipline of the public good as something that concerned only other people, bemoaned by Tacitus (Hist. I, 11: invidiae rei publicae et alienae), had greatly increased; and the mass of the population, as their behaviour shows (see especially Section III of this chapter), had no real interest in the preservation of the empire.

The other aspect of Rostovtzeff’s explanation of the ‘decline’ on which I wish to comment is the very end of his last paragraph. ‘It is possible’, he asks dispendently, ‘to extend a higher civilization to the lower classes without debase their standard and debasing its quality to the vanishing point? Is not every civilization bound to decay as soon as it begins to penetrate the masses?’ To this I think, we can reply in the words of Gordon Childe: the cultural capital accumulated by the civilizations of antiquity was no more annihilated in the collapse of the Roman empire than smaller accumulations had been in the lesser catastrophes that inter-repulsed and terminated the Bronze Age. Of course, as then, many refinements were swept away. But for the most part these had been designed for, and enjoyed by, only a small and narrow class. Most achievements that had proved themselves effective and had become firmly established on a genuinely popular footing by the participation of wider classes were conserved. [...] So in the Eastern Mediterranean, city life, with all its implications, still continued. Most crafts were still plied with all their technical skill and equipment evolved in Classical and Hellenistic times.18

VIII. The ‘decline and fall’: an explanation (ii)

Here I agree with Childe: the material arts are never the exclusive preserve of a governing class. When a civilization collapses, the governing class often disintegrates, and its culture (its literature and art and so forth) often comes to a full stop, and the society which succeeds has to make a fresh start. This is not true of the material arts and crafts: luxury trades of course may disappear, and particular techniques may die out as the demand for them ceases, but in the main the technological heritage is transmitted more or less intact to succeeding generations. This has been the experience of the last five thousand years and more in the Far Eastern, Near Eastern, Mediterranean and Western societies. Each society can normally begin in many material respects where its predecessor left off, and that does matter. It appears, therefore, that it was above all in the degree to which it had (to use Rostovtzeff’s phrase) penetrated the masses that the legacy of Graeco-Roman civilization remained continuously alive. When Europe once more began to advance, as it very soon did once the effects of the barbarian invasions had spent themselves, the old techniques, handed down from father to son and from craftsman to apprentice, were still available for the medieval world to build on. The ‘economic decline’ of the Roman empire was essentially a deterioration in the economic organization of the empire rather than in its techniques, which deteriorated little, except in so far as the lack of any widespread effective demand for certain luxury goods and services eventually dried up their supply. Methods of production, such as they were, seem to have held their own even when the artistic value of the work produced became poorer. It has been said by the American historian Lynn White,19 and I agree, that ‘there is no proof that any important skills of the Graeco-Roman world were lost during the Dark Ages even in the unenlightened West, much less in the flourishing Byzantine and Saracen Orient’ (TIMA 130, cf. II n. 11 below). Indeed, as White has claimed, ‘From the twelfth and even from the eleventh century there was a rapid replacement of human by non-human energy wherever great quantities of power were needed or where the required motion was so simple and monotonous that a man could be replaced by a mechanism. The chief glory of the later Middle Ages was not its cathedrals or its epics or its scholasticism: it was the building for the first time in history of a complex civilization which rested not on the backs of sweating slaves or coolies but primarily on non-human power’ (TIMA 136). That ‘primarily’ is an exaggeration, but there is an important truth in White’s statement, and we could certainly say that by the later Middle Ages there was a real prospect of building ‘a complex civilization which rested less on the backs of sweating slaves or coolies and more on non-human power’.

Pressure on the ‘curial class’

In the last section I showed how the property classes of the Graeco-Roman world as a whole were able during roughly the first two and a half centuries of the Principate (let us say, from the time of Augustus to the end of the Severan period in A.D. 235) to tighten their grip on those below them and place themselves in an even more commanding position than they had previously been, by reducing the political and constitutional rights of those members of
the lower classes who were Roman citizens. I must now describe briefly how and why the governing class of the empire, the men of conspicuous wealth, came to put increasing pressure upon the lower section of the propertied class itself: namely, what I am calling the curial class (defined below). I do not need to give a general account of the curial class, as the whole subject has been dealt with by A. H. M. Jones, with great generation, in several different works. 1 This pressure upon the curial class began well before the end of the second century and was already far advanced in the early third; in the fourth century it was intensified, the pressure continued in the fifth, and by the sixth century the curial class had been greatly weakened and had lost nearly all its former prestige.

When I speak of the "curial class" I mean those members of the propertied class (with their families) who made up the Councils of the cities (plebeii) of the Greek East (and of course the corresponding Western centres) and filled all the important magistracies, to which they were originally (in the Classical and Hellenistic periods) elected by the Assembly but came eventually (mainly during the first two centuries of the Christian era) to be nominated by the Council itself or enrolled by officials appointed by it (cf. V. iii above and Appendix IV below). As councillors they were called in Latin decuriones, in Greek δικτυται, and they are often referred to in English as "decurions"; but the term "curiales" (curialis) was often used of decurions and members of their families by the early fourth century, 2 and as I wish to speak of a "class" I find the adjectival form "curial" convenient. The word is derived from curia, the Latin word for a senate house, which also came to be used — as did the term ordines (ordinarius) — by the collective councillors of a particular city. In the Latin West the term ordinium of a substantial town could be expected to number about a hundred members; in the Greek East it might sometimes be a great deal larger. 3 I may add that in some areas of the Greek world where city life had been slow to develop we may find occasional exceptions to the general rules I am stating here; for example the end of § 2 of Appendix IV below for an inscription (IGB Helv., IV. 2263) relating to a Macedonian community which in A.D. 158 had citizens, an ekklesia, and an annual magistrate (a polemarchos), but apparently no Council. Nevertheless, the picture I am presenting here is true in the vast majority of cases.

In strictness it might well be preferable to describe the decurions and their families as the "curial ordines" rather than "curial class", for of course a man became a decurion only when he actually held that position and not merely because he owned property of a sufficient value (corpus) to qualify him for it — perhaps, in substantial towns in the Latin West in the early second century, something in the neighbourhood of HS 100,000 (the figure at Comum in the early second century: Pliny, Ep. I. xix. 2), one quarter of the equinan census and one tenth of the senatorial; but the figure might vary very greatly, according to the size and importance of the city concerned (see Jones, LRE II. 736-9; Duncan-Jones, EREIQS 80-8, 147-8). However, by the time my story in this section really opens, in the later second century, the class of men financially qualified to become decurions (and not able to achieve the more exalted position of homonai), through membership of the senatorial or equinan order (or order) to coincide with some degree with the actual curial order. Curial status had always been desirable as an honour, and from the first half of the second century onwards it involved important legal privileges (discussed in Section I of this chapter), so that most men qualified for it would naturally try to obtain it. It is true that in the early second century there was already, in a few parts and desultory, in most other parts of the Greek world, a general feeling among the upper classes (which Pliney evidently shared) that decurions ought to be chosen from families already of senatorial status — from homonai homonai rather than equestrian, as Pliney puts it (Ep. X. 39. 3). But being a decurion, desirable as it was in itself, was beginning to be seen as the second half of the century to involve financial burdens and the less affluent found it increasingly difficult to discharge. An inscription from Galatia dated to 415 can refer to a citizen as having been a "councillor with public benefits", but this need meant no more than that he had been elected into the ordines, as an honour, without being made to pay the fees normally exacted in such cases. 4 However, from the later second century pressure was intensified on financially qualified men who were still "plebeii" to become members of the ordines. An interesting papyri of the early third century, as restored with reasonable probability, speaks of men possessing a curial rating (honorarius est qui) who are not yet enrolled on the curial register (honorarium honos), and says that they must not evade both the "services imposed on the common people" (honorati honorato) on the ground that they possess curial means (honorati honorati), and also curial letters (honorati honorata) on the ground that they are not yet entered on the curial register (RB III, 3396). 5 Even in the fourth century seen who were qualified to become decurions could occasionally be found, 6 but it seems likely that by the end of the Severan period (A.D. 235) they were already fairly rare, and that what I have called curial class and curial order very nearly coincided. What looks at first sight like an order turns out to be the curial class as a class. It is of great interest that although the post of decurion might involve considerable financial and supervisory responsibilities, decurions could actually provide in 255 that even illiteracy was not to be allowed to prevent a man from shouldering the burdens associated with being a decurion ("C. X. xxi. 608: expunditur decurio munus minus non prodest manu"). 7 Illiterate decurions sometimes turn up in the papyri. 8 As we saw in III, 3 above, the vast majority of decurions in all the major cities (except a few, like Ostrii and Paphlagonia, which were particularly "commercial" in character) were primarily landowners. In smaller and poorer cities, where the least wealthy of the decurions might be men of very moderate property, more of them would be likely to go in for manufacture. In a real one-horse-town like Abingdon in Britain, 9 in 303, we find that Cæcilius, who is actually a "servus" (a magistrate), is a working weaver, who takes his dinner with his workmates, whether slaves or wage-labourers (nom operarios). At Opole, Appendix, II. 1, 270, cf. 258, 324, in CSEL XXVII, ed. C. Zawadzka. And Augustin mentions a "poor curial" named Cencius, who had been discharged of the municipium Tulitense near Hippo; he calls him a "simple peasant", simplex rusticus (De civitate Dei. cap. i. 15, in CSEL XII. 644).
deal, according to whether harvests were good, whether conditions in their
neighbourhood were peaceful and whether (though spontaneous
irruptions), whether the smallholders were subjected to unusual fiscal extortion or
oppression by powerful neighbours (cf. IV. it above), and so forth. All in all, I
would expect that as the return from chattel slavery declined, additional
exploitation of the free poor, even when facilitated by the depression of their
legal status, would hardly redress the balance.

By the time of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius (161-80) the Roman empire as a
whole had not suffered any great calamity since the beginning of the Principate,
partly from the civil wars of 68-9 and one or two local revolts of which the
most serious probably was that led by C. Julius Civilis in Lower Germany and
north-west Gaul in 69-70. Wars, even in the reigns of Domitian and Trajan,
were not ruinously expensive, if we allow for the considerable booty obtained in
some of them, especially Trajan’s last campaign in Dacia in 106. Most of the
sums of money transmitted in our literary sources for public expenditure and
receipts are unreliable, and the figure of HS 40,000,000,000 which Vespasian
is said by Suetonius (Vesp. 16.3) to have thought necessary to meet immediate
requirements at his accession in 69-70 (the largest sum of money mentioned in
antiquity), according to Thomas, ESAB V.43, has no better credentials than
the rest; but Vespasian evidently did take the usual step of raising
the amount of imperial tribute, perhaps substantially (Dio Cass. LXVI viii.3.4;
Suet. , Vesp. 16.1). It was in the reign of Marcus Aurelius that things began to go
badly wrong. The Parthian war that opened in 162 must have been very costly,
and it may be taken that in the 160s, during the wise reign of Marcus Aurelius,
there were heavy fiscal burdens brought back from a dreadful plague, which raged for some years in many parts of the Roman
world. The Germans became a real menace. A German irruption across the
Danubie between 166 and 171 (perhaps 170 or 171), which even reached Italy,
was followed by a series of bitter wars against the German Marcomanni and
Quadi and the Sarmatian Iazyges which occupied a good many of the later years
of Marcus’s reign. In 170 or 171 a raid by the Costoboci actually penetrated as
far as Attica; and in 171 Baetica (southern Spain) was attacked by Moorish rebels
from north Africa (see Birley, MA 225-9; IRMA 222 etc.). Among internal
revolts, the most serious may have been that of the Boukedel in Egypt, in the
early 170s, led by a priest, Isidore, which was crushed with some difficulty by
Avidius Cassius; we have no more than a brief mention of it, by Dio Cassius
(LXXI.iv) and the Historia Augusta (Marc. Aurel. 21.2, Avid. Cato. 6.7).

There are stories that Marcus sold the crown jewels and his other treasures by
auction (perhaps in 169) to raise money for his wars, and that he once refused
his soldiers’ demand for a donative with the significant assertion that anything
they got beyond the normal amount would be ‘wrong from the blood of
their kith and kin’ (Dio LXXI iii.3). It is also said that of the surplus in the
Treasury of HS 2,700,000,000 left to Marcus by his predecessor Antoninus Pius
in 161, a mere HS 1 million remained in 193, after his reign and the disastrous
one of his unbalanced son Commodus (Dio LXXIII 1 LXXIV viii.3, with v.4).
Then, from 193 to 197, there was another burst of civil wars, about which we
are not accorded, informed but not too much contemporary interest has to have
involved some bloody battles with great loss of life (see Dio Cass. LXXIV viii.1;
LXXV vi.1 and vii.1-2): this is the beginning of the Severan period.
Western world have either been members of that class or have thoroughly shared its outlook, we need feel no surprise that the Antonine period should still be remembered as a kind of Golden Age. I can think of no statement by an ancient historian about the Roman world that has been quoted more often than Gibbon's:

If a man were called to fix the period in the history of the world during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would, without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus (DiRE 178) –

that is to say, the years from 96 to 180.

Under the Severan dynasty (193-235), as is well known, compulsion was more and more strenuously applied to the curial class. There is no need to go into detail: public services of all kinds were demanded of magistrates and decurions, some of them, which came to be known as munera personalia, imposing primarily personal service, and others, munera patrimonialia, the expenditure of money; in time munera mixta were recognised, which involved both personal and pecuniary service. Even munera personalia, however, might involve considerable incidental expense. There was an elaborate series of provisions giving immunity, set out at length in the Digest LVIII and often alluded to elsewhere: these were revised again and again by the emperors, usually in such a way as to restrict or withdraw the immunity and make the service even more general.

A natural result of the pressure on the curial class which I have just described, emerging from the Antonine age into the Severan, was a marked fall in civic expenditure by 'public-spirited, major ambitions and self-advertising' men on civic buildings and on 'foundations' to provide benefits for their fellow-citizens and sometimes others. (The decline in the number of the latter is evident to the eye from the diagrams in Berhard Laurm, Stiftungen in der griechischen und romischen Antike [Leipzig, 1914] 1-9.) We need not be surprised to find that from about the middle of the third century onwards the cities, in setting up honorific inscriptions, tend to concentrate their praises on the provincial governor rather than on local grandees.

I have said hardly anything so far to explain how the curial class came to be steadily depopulated and ultimately reduced to a mere shadow of itself, especially in the East. It used to be customary for historians to express great sympathy with the curiales and shed tears over their sad fate; but in recent years it has been realised, largely owing to the researches of A. H. M. Jones (see n. 1 above), that we need to look at the whole question in a very different light. Characteristic of the earlier tendency is the picture presented by Jules Toutain, whose book, The Economic Life of the Ancient World, we are told that the people who suffered most from the economic decline of the third century were the 'wealthy and middle classes - the landowners, manufacturers and merchants, to whom economic prosperity really owed its being' (p. 325, my italics). Now the landowners, at any rate, were precisely the people who had appropriated and monopolised what prosperity there was in the Graeco-Roman world. To say that prosperity 'owed its being' to them is a grotesque distortion of the truth. In the third century, the curial class had represented a high and influential curialis class, in the sense of those members of my propertied class who were able to live by their land without having to spend any appreciable time on working it. But...
The longest of all the titles in the Theodosian Code of 438 is XII. De decurionibus; it contains 192 laws, from Constantine's reign to 438; and other laws affecting decurions appear elsewhere in the Code; there are still others again in Justinian's Code (X.xxxii and elsewhere). By far the most important consideration, in the eyes of the emperors, was to prevent decurions from evading their obligations, for example by escaping into the army, or into one of the more profitable branches of the imperial service, or into the priesthood. This story has been well told in detail (see n. 1 above), and I need not recapitulate it here. I will say only that the evidence shows all too well the extent to which the richer members of the order were able to escape from their obligations to their curia by doing the very thing the emperors were so anxious to prevent, sometimes by obtaining honorary cadetti (letters patent), granting them some rank which conferred exemption from curial duties, sometimes by actually obtaining some post which carried such rank. The constant repetition of some of these laws shows how inefficient they were: patronage (affidavit; see my SV) could often procure the evasion of a law; and the Councils themselves tended to be reluctant to coerce defectors, partly (as Councils would claim) because it was so difficult for them to operate effectively against a man who had obtained high rank and because it might be dangerous to incur his enmity, and partly also through sheer corruption and the hopes of favours to come from the ex-decursus (see esp. Jones, LRE I.409; II.754-5). As Norman has said, curial decline in the fourth century "could certainly never have proceeded with such speed had there not been a powerful support for it from inside the Curiae themselves, not merely that manifested by evasion and subterfuge, but that also provided by the wealthy principalis" (GLMS 84).

The desire of decurions to obtain senatorial rank illicitly, even if it meant selling much of their property in order to procure the necessary bribe, was by no means motivated only by the wish to escape their financial obligations - which might, indeed, be increased by senatorial status (see Jones, LRE II.544-5, 748 ff.). The sheer prestige itself was a major consideration, in a society intensely conscious of rank and order; but perhaps most important of all was the desire of the decurion to obtain personal security against the maltreatment which in the fourth century was being increasingly meted out to curials by provincial governors and other imperial officials, but which they would not dare to inflict upon men of senatorial status.

One interesting sign of the gradual deterioration in the position of the curial class during the fourth century is the fact that whereas all decurions are still specifically exempted from all flogging by imperial constitutions of 349 or 350 and 359 (CTH XII.39, 47), by 376 the use of the plumbata, the leaded scourge, is permitted upon all except the leading decurions (the decuriprimitivus), although the emperors express the pious hope that this will be inflicted upon them in moderation! (Sabaetus moderato, IX.xxxii.2.1). Although constitutions of 380 and 381 again forbid the plumbata for any decurion (XII.I.80,85), by 387 the use of the dreaded weapon is permitted again in fiscal cases, and this time even a principal decurion (principalis) is not immune (XII.117, cf. 126, 190). It is not surprising, then, that we find Libanius, in the late fourth century, insisting that it was above all the frequent flogging of decurions which had driven so many of them to seek the rank of senator (which alone would give secure immunity),

even at the cost of paying a very large price for the privilege, and that in this way the ranks of the councillors had become depleted. The severity of Later Roman floggings is brought out by several literary passages, notably in St. Anthony, suggesting (even if we allow for the man's habitual exaggeration) that in the mid-fourth century a flogging, even without the use of the plumbata, could easily result in death (Hist. Aegypti 60: cf. 12, 72).

In the later empire, for example, the relationship of the relationship between a local Council and the general population, as a leading member of the local property class liked to imagine it, is given by Libanius: the relationship is that of parents to children (Oeuv. XI [Antiochius] 150 fl. esp. 152). The Emperor Majorian in 438 could still, in a charming phrase, state it as an unbroken fact that the decurions were "the sustenance of the commonwealth and the vital parts of the cities", "nullus spectaculum esse nee peccator nee unius cultum mutus ignoscit" (Nest. Maj. VII.3). In the East it seems to have been early in the sixth century, in the reign of Anastasius (491-518), that the city Councils finally ceased to matter very much in the local decision-making process, and perhaps even to meet. The decurions were now reduced to little more than minor local officials responsible for tax-collection, and the performance of other public duties. In the West the position was not very different, even if there is evidence of city Councils meeting as late as the early seventh century; see Jones, LRE II.757-63.)

The whole process brings out admirably the complete control exercised over the whole Graeco-Roman world by the very highest class of senator, and of the man who had merged into a single order by at least the beginning of the fifth century (see VI.61 above, ad fin.). There were now more grades within the senatorial order; the lowest were chorissini, then came spectatores and finally illustris; by the mid-fifth century the most illustrious were magnifentissimi and even gloriosissimi. The utter lack of any kind of real power below the highest class left even men of some property and local distinction helpless subjects of the great, except in so far as the emperors chose to protect them, as they were obliged to do to some extent, if the empire was to be kept going (cf. VI.61 above). The screw, having already been tightened at the bottom of the social scale by landlords and tax-collectors abound as far as it would safely go, and indeed further, had from the later second century onwards (as the situation of the empire became less favourable), and regularly during the third, to be put on the curial class, as the only alternative to the increased taxation of the really rich, which they would never have endured. As soon as the curials began to change even to a small extent from the beneficaries of the system into its victims (as those below them had always been), they made insubordinate protests, which used to receive unduly sympathetic attention from historians. There is plenty of evidence that they did not allow themselves to suffer until they had squeezed the very last drop out of those beneath them, in particular their coloni. The priest Salvian, writing in Gaul in the second quarter of the fifth century, could exclaim, "What else is the life of curiales but injustice" (instituta: De gub. Diet. III.30). We are often reminded that Salvian was prone to exaggeration (cf. Section 2 of this chapter); and indeed in the same passage he can see in the lives of business men (negotiantes) only 'fraud and petty', of officials 'false accusation' (callumia), and of soldiers 'plunder' (capina). But lest we be tempted to dismiss entirely his structures upon curials, we should look at what is, to my
mind, perhaps the most extraordinary of all the constitutions ever promulgated by the Roman emperors: one issued by Justianin in 531 (CIL ii. 52. pr. 1), which strictly prohibits all *まるて* from ever becoming bishops or priests, on the ground that it is not right for a man who has been brought up to indulge in extortion with violence, and the sins that in all likelihood accompany this, and is fresh from deeds of the utmost hardness as a *まるて*, suddenly to take holy orders and to admonish and instruct concerning benevolence and poverty? (With the *まるて* [bουλευταί], Justianin brackets *おそらく* [εὐοδεῖς], members of the staff of a provincial governor, on whom see Section iv of this chapter.)

* * * * *

I have seldom had occasion so far to notice movements of revolt or resistance on the part of the lower classes in the ancient world. I shall have a certain amount to say on this subject in the last two sections of this chapter. But since I shall be dealing there mainly with the Middle and Later Roman Empire, and of course this book is concerned with the Greek East rather than the West. I shall have little or nothing to say about a number of local revolts against Roman rule, almost entirely in the West and during the Republic and early Principate, which have been discussed recently in two articles by Stephen L. Dyson, with the praiseworthy aim of applying to their knowledge available today about movements against modern colonialism.

(iii) Defection to the ‘barbarians’, peasant revolts, and indifference to the disintegration of the Roman empire

The fable of the donkey which receives with indifference the news of a hostile invasion (see VII, r above) may help us to achieve a better understanding of the quite considerable body of evidence from both Eastern and Western parts of the Roman empire that the attitude of the lower classes towards the ‘barbarians’ (as I can hardly help calling the Germanic and other invaders, the barbari) was by no means always one of fear and hostility, and that movements of the ‘barbarians’ (destructive as they could be, especially to property-owners) were often received with indifference and even on occasion positive pleasure and co-operation, in particular by poor men immediately benefited by taxation. (As we shall see later, even men of some property who had been the victims of injustice and legal corruption are known to have defected to the barbarans.) There is a considerable body of evidence from the second century to the seventh of flight or desertion to the ‘barbarians’, or of appeals to them or even help given to them, which has never, as far as I know, been fully presented, in English at any rate. I cannot claim to have made anything like a complete collection of the material, but I will mention here the main texts I have come across.

It is convenient to mention also in this section some evidence for peasant revolts, especially in Gaul and Spain, which has been very well discussed by E. A. Thompson (PPLGRS 83-4, ed. Finlay, 304-31). It is not my intention, however, to try to give anything like a full list of the internal rebellions and dissensions which broke out in various parts of the Greek and Roman world during the Principate and Later Empire; for most of these episodes the evidence is bad and it is unclear whether there was any significant element of revolution from below or even of social protest. Sometimes our only source is of such poor quality or so enigmatic that we are not able to rely on it. For example, it only in a speech of Dio Chrysostom (XXXII.71-2), which has been variously dated, between 70 and the reign of Trajan, that we hear of a serious disturbance (τυφός) in Alexandria, necessitating the use of armed force by the prefect of Egypt to suppress it. There is a mysterious reference in a mid-second-century Spartan inscription to δυσμοι (disturbances, revolutionary movements), which may conceivably be connected with a δύσμος in Greece mentioned in the Historia Augustana having been put down by the Emperor Antoninus Pius (A.D. 138-61). And again, it is only in the Historia Augustana that we have a reference to ‘something resembling a slave revolt’ (παραπολεμαί έν οικεία θέλη Διονυσίου) in Sicily during the late reign of Gallienus (260-8), taking the form, it is said, of widespread banditry (λατρενίου τρονγανίας). Banditry or brigandage is often, of course, a symptom of social distress (cf. VII, above), but we also come across certain alleged brigand chieftains who are likely to have begun with a following consisting largely of peasants, mercenaries, runaway slaves and other humble folk, who were due to local despots: for instance, the aventured and alleged bandit, Cleon of Gorgonae in the last century B.C. Sometimes, as in the movement in the area of Carthage, early in 226, which led to the proclamation as emperor (and the exceedingly brief reign of the aged Gordian III, a rich landowner who was then presiding over Africa), it is evident that there was no ‘popular’ or ‘peasant’ uprising but that the whole insurrection came from the upper classes – in the African example I have just mentioned, from a group of ‘well-born’ and rich young men, who resented event increases in taxation and the severity with which they were applied by the procurator of the Emperor Maximin, and were able to mobilise their dependants in the countryside and bring them into Carthage (Ptolemy VII.24-26, with 34 f.). In some cases – even events of real importance – almost everything is uncertain: for instance, the role of Matrides (or Mariodos) and of the lower class of Antioch in the taking of that city by Shapur I of Persia, in 256 or thereabouts. Sometimes the respective roles played in a rebellion by the upper and lower classes are not made clear by our sources and are very variously interpreted by different historians — the rebellion of Fintus in north Africa in 372-3 to 374 is a case in point: of other African revolts hardly any details are known they appear to me to have been essentially tribal movements.

I wish to say with all possible emphasis that in all cases known to me in which there have been revolts for the imperial throne there is no sign that class struggle ever played any significant part. This is true of the competition for the principate on the death of Nero to 68, of the series of armed conflicts from 193 to 197, and also of the half-century from the end of the Severan dynasty in March 235 to the accession of Diocletian late in 284, when the succession was virtually always settled by force, and the only emperor who tried to contain the years of his reign in double figures was Galerius, whose rule from 293 to 296 with his father Valerian and sole emperor from 296 to 298. Nor can any of the few subsequent civil wars in the fourth century be seen as a class war, even where (as I shall explain in Section iv of this chapter) we do find a certain number of men driven desperate by heavy taxation and a highly oppressive administration taking the
side of a pretender: Procopius in 265-6 - their support was but a minor and incidental factor of his rebellion. All competition for the imperial dignity was entirely between members of the governing class, attempting to seize or retain power for themselves; and the contests were all decided by at least the threat, and often the use, of armed force.

At the very beginning of the second century we hear of deserters to Decedalus, the Dacian chief. According to Dio Cassius (as preserved in our surviving excerpts) Decedalus gave a reluctant undertaking to surrender to the Romans both the deserters (hoti aemoneis) and his armed and his military machines and artificers (mechanistata met mechanopaptati). He was honored by the Romans for the future "not to receive any deserter or to employ any soldier from the Roman empire," and Dio adds, "for it was by seducing men from there that he had been obtaining the majority of his forces, and the rest of them." (LXXVIII. 5.x-5.) On other occasions too we hear of deserters, and sometimes the numbers given are so strikingly large as to suggest that there must have been civilian defectors as well as military deserters whom the Romans were anxious to reclaim. (The expression abdominal, captives, certainly included civilian as well as military prisoners; see Dio LXXI. 18.) Dio speaks on several occasions of deserters to the Quadri, Marcomanni and others between the late 160s and the 180s. We hear that the Quadri in 170 promised to surrender all the deserters and the captives: 13,000 at first, and the rest later (Dio LXXII. 24). A promise they did not fulfill (xiii. 2). About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fled to the Quadri. About five years later the Sarmatians (1168) accepted 1,000,000 captives and fle
even of their garrisons, to offer any resistance to the Gothic invasions of the mid-third century is an indication of the low state of morale at this time: see especially Zosimus LXXXII.xxv. Zosimus also speaks of resistance given to the Goths in c. 256 by fishermen of eastern Thrace, enabling them to cross the Bosphorus (IV. xxxxII.2; cf. 1, for co-operation by captives and traders). It is in c. 284, in the reign of Carus, that we first hear of the Bacaudae, a name of unknown origin, given to participants in a whole series of peasant rebellions in Gaul and Spain which continued intermittently until c. 456 (see Thompson again in SAE 31I-2O). Their first revolt was easily crushed by Maximinus in 285. For the fourth century there is virtually no direct evidence about Bacaudae, but our literary sources are ready to discuss military operations against lower-class rebels; and when Ammianus, writing of the early years of the reign of Valentinian I (364-78), alludes darkly to 'many battles fought in various parts of Gaul' which he thinks 'lies worthy of narration' than those against German barbarians, and goes on to say that 'it is superfluous to describe them, both because their outcome led to nothing worth while, and because it is unnecessary to prolong a history with ignoble details', we may suspect (as Thompson shrewdly observes) that Valentinian was suppressing further movements of Bacaudae - and without any resounding and complete success. The most important risings of Bacaudae were in the earlier fifth century: in Gaul in 407-17, 435-7 and 442, and perhaps 448, and in Spain in 441, 443, 449, 451, and 456. On several of these occasions imperial armies operated against them, led by commanders who included Flavius Asturius and Merobaudes. These risings, coming as they did at a time when the Roman world was facing unparalleled pressure on its western frontiers, may have played an important part in bringing about the disintegration of a considerable part of the Western empire. I have space for only two of the many small scraps of evidence that have survived regarding these revolts. First, the eminent senator Rutilius Namatanianus, describing in his poem De rebus suis a journey he took from Rome to his native Gaul towards the end of 417 (see VI. vi.104 below), praises the activity of his relative Exuperantius in restoring 'law and order' in Armorica, the main centre of Bacauda activity, a large district around the mouth of the Loire. Exuperantius, he says, is now teaching the area 'to love the return of peace from exile' (the text has a highly technical term, postillum), 'he has restored the laws and brought back liberty, and he does not allow the Armoricans to be slaves to their own domestics' (et servos in sui gentes non init esse sibi, I.213-18) - a clear indication of the class war which had been taking place in north-west Gaul. Secondly, in a comedy called the Querulus, 4 by an unknown author writing apparently in the early years of the fifth century, there is a disparaging reference to life 'beside the Loire' (surely under the regime of the Bacaudae), where men live under the ini germinem, another name for which is 'woodland laws' (infern sintria), and where muttit speedily and capital sentences are pronounced under an oak tree and recorded on bones; and indeed ubertum licet, 'where anything goes' (Querulus, pp.16-17 ed. R. Peper). Thompson, in SAE 316-17.

There is no explicit evidence of peasant revolutionary in Britain in the fourth century; and Collingwood put his case too strongly when he claimed that because 'the same legal and administrative system, the same distinction between rich men in great villas and poor men in village huts, and the same barbarian invasions, were present towards the end of the fourth century in Britain as in Gaul', it is hardly to be doubted that effects were identical too; and that the wandering bands which Theodosius saw in Britain [the reference to Amm. Marc. XXVII. vii. 9, A.D. 368] included large numbers of Bacaudae. However, Thompson has recently made quite a good case for seeing the revolt of 496 in Britain and the whole of Armorica and in other provinces of Gaul', described by Zosimus VI. 2-3, as a movement of a type akin to the revolts of the Gallic Bacaudae. We do not know enough about the social situation in Britain in the early fifth century or about the details of the revolt itself to make a positive affirmation, but Thompson's interpretation is not contradicted by any ancient source and is probable enough in itself. Apart from the material I have been discussing there are for the time of Constantine onwards many small scraps of evidence and one or two particularly striking passages. References to the flight of slaves to the barbarians are only to be expected, and I will mention but two examples. C.J VI.5.3, a constitation issued by Constantine between 317 and 323, prescribes as a penalty for such desertion a footman or conscription to the mines. (Mutilation as a punishment for crime had rarely been inflicted by the Romans until now, except in special cases under military discipline, but in the Christian Empire it gradually became more frequent, and in the seventh and eighth centuries it was quite common.) Secondly, it could be said that during the first siege of Rome by Alaric in 410, in the winter of 409-10, virtually all the slaves in western Rome totalling 40,000, escaped to the Gothic camp (Zos. V. xii. 3). It is hardly significant, too, that the ecclesiastical historian Eusebius should speak of Christians fleeing to the barbarians during the 'Great' persecution (403 and the years following) and being well received and allowed to practice their religion (Vita Const. II. 53). It is more interesting to mention an edict of Constantine in 323 demanding the burning alive of anyone who affords barbarians an opportunity to plunder Romans, or shares in the spoils (CTA VII. 1), and another edict of 367, ordering enquiry to be made, whenever anyone claims that he had been captured by barbarians, to discover whether he had gone off under compulsion or of his own free will (CTA VII. 1 = C.J VIII. L9, quoted above). Ammianus, telling the story of the Persian invasion of Roman Mesopotamia in 359, mentions a former Gallic trooper whom he himself encountered, who had deserted long ago, to avoid being punished for a crime, and who had been well received and trusted by the Persians and often sent back into Roman territory as a spy - he of course was executed (XVIII. vi. 16). In 360 Const. Theodosius disband the atrami (perhaps a branch of the imperial civil service), who had given secret information to the barbarians (Amm. XXVIII. 65). From the years 376-8 we have some extraordinarily interesting evidence from Ammianus about the behaviour of many members of the lower classes in the Balkan area, which we may compare with the tirade of St Gregory Thaumaturgus in the 25th, mentioned above. Under Fritigern and other chiefs the Visigoths, who had been allowed by the Emperor Valentinian to cross the Danube into Thrace in 376 (see Appendix III §19 below), but had been very badly treated by the Roman commanders, began to ravage Thrace. Fritigern advised his men to leave the cities alone (he 'kept peace with walls'), he told
them!) and plunder the country districts. Those who surrendered to the ‘barbarians’ or were captured by them, says Ammianus, ‘pointed out the rich villages, especially those where ample supplies of food were said to be available’. In particular, certain gold-miners, ‘unable to bear the heavy burden of taxation’, did not want to come under the ‘barbarian’ great service by revealing to them hidden reserves of food and other resources to the local inhabitants (Amm. X XI. vi. 4-7). Roman soldiers who deserted to the Goths also gave them much valuable information (id. vii.7; cf. ev. 2). Even after the disastrous battle of Adrianople in 378, we hear of 300 Roman infantry going over to the Goths, only to be massacred (XXXI. xv. 4); some guardmen (candidati) who tried to help the Goths to capture the city of Adrianople soon afterwards were detected and beheaded (id. 8-9). Yet information was still given to the Goths by deserters according to Ammianus it was so detailed, concerning Perinthus (the modern Ereghi) and neighbouring cities, that the Goths ‘knew about the interior of the very houses, not to mention the cities’ (id. xvi.1).

Dealing with the year 380, Zosimus speaks of ‘every city and every field’ in Macedonia and Thessaly being filled with lamentation and appeals from everyone to the ‘barbarians’ to come to their help: it is just after he has mentioned that instructions had been given for the rigorous exaction of taxes from these areas, in spite of the serious damage recently inflicted upon them by marauding Goths (IV. xxxii. 2-3). Nicopolis in Thrace seems to have gone over to the Goths about this time (Eunapius fr. 50). A constitution of 397 threatens with death anyone who goes into a criminal conspiracy with the ‘barbarians’, to kill some great man or a member of the imperial civil service (CTH IX.xiv. 3-5). A large number of men described by Zosimus as ‘slaves’ (victimati) and ‘outcasts’ joined the army of Trivigild the Ostrogoth in 399 and participated in the plundering of Phrygia and Lydia (Zos. V. xiii. 3-4); and a year or two later we hear of runaway slaves (victimati) and military deserters’ plundering the countryside of Thrace, until they were crushed by the Gothic magister militum (and consul in 401) Flavius Fravitta (Zos. V. xvi. 3), who is also credited with having earlier ‘freed the whole East from Cilicia to Phoenicia and Palestine from the scourge of bandits’ (or pirates, Hestai, xx.1). In the first decade of the fifth century St Jerome complains that Pannonians have joined the ‘barbarians’ invading Gaul: ‘O legenda res publica,’ he exclaims (Ep. 123.15.2). There is a fascinating passage in the Eucharistio of Paulinus of Pella (written in 459), referring to his presence in the city of Vastae (the modern Bazas, south-east of Bordeaux) during its unsuccessful siege by the Goths under Ataualp in 415-16. Paulinus speaks of an ineffectual armed revolt by ‘a body of slaves' (Jictio servitis), combined with the senseless fury of a few young men, who were actually of free birth, and he says it was aimed deliberately at the slaughter of the leading citizens (the nobilita), including Paulinus himself, ‘innocent blood’, with that of his fellows, was saved only by divine intervention. Two or three years later, in 418, we hear of a ‘rebello’ in Palestine, put down by the Goths Plinta, cumes et magister militum of Theodosius II, and in 431 of a revolt in the West, by the soldiers, who were busily engaged by Aetius, but we know nothing of the details in either case. Soldiers in the army sent by Justinian for the conquest of Italy in the 540s seem to have deserted wholesale: Procopius can even make Belisarius complain to the emperor that ‘the majority have deserted (Bell. VII 82.1-8; cf. VIII = Goh. III xii. 8; and see the next paragraph below). Other sources too, both Greek and Latin, speak of the inhabitants of the Roman empire as actually desiring the coming of the ‘barbarians’. The fact that the panegyric delivered to the Emperor Julian by Claudius Mamertinus on 1 January 362 includes a phrase to this effect may be of little or no significance (Paep. Lat. XI. v. 2, ed. E. Geisler: itiam barbaris divinatorem). And it would be negligent not to take more seriously the statement of Theodatus to the Emperor Valens in 368 that ‘many of the nobles who have held office for three generations made their subjects long for the barbarians’ (Dror. VIII. 115): the orator had just been speaking of the tremendous burden of taxation, which he represents as having been doubled in the forty years before the accession of Valens to 364, but now halved by Valens (I11.1.12). Similarly Orosius, writing of the irruption of the Goths into Gaul and Spain early in the fifth century, could state that some Romans preferred to live among the ‘barbarians’, just as liberty, rather than endure the anxiety of paying taxes in the Roman empire (VIII. 41.3; inter barbaros pauperem libertatem quam inter Romanos tributaram sollicitudinem autem). Here again, as so often, it is the burden of taxation which outweighs all other considerations. Procopius too, after describing the vicious behaviour of the army of Justinian in Italy in the earl-540s, could admit that the soldiers made the Italians pay too much of the burden of the war (Bell. VII = Goth. III. x.1-4, cf. ev. 15-16): and in this case also we hear of unjust extortions practised by Alexander the logothete, whom Justinian sent to Ravenna in 510, and a little later by Bessus at Rome in 545-6.

A particularly eloquent complaint is that of Salvian, a Christian priest in Southern Gaul, who probably wrote in the early 440s. Making very some severe structures on the wealthy class of Gaul in his day, whom he compares to a pack of brigands, he says that the oppressed poor (and not only they) used to flee for refuge to the ‘barbarians’ (De gub. Dei V. 2.1-3; 27-8, 36-8) or to the Basques (V. 22, 24-6, cf. Section iv of this chapter). Salvian stresses above all the oppressiveness of Roman taxation, which allows the wealthy to get off lightly but burdens the poor beyond endurance (V. 20.1-30.1; V. 15-18, 35-6; 34-44). I decline to follow Jones in discounting almost entirely the evidence of Orosius (VII. 41.7; see the preceding paragraph) as ‘suspect’ and that of Salvian as ‘biased and unreliable’.

Although of course I recognise that Salvian is prone to rhetorical exaggeration, like the great majority of later Latin and Greek writers, I agree with Ernst Stein that his De gub. Dei is ‘la source la plus valente sur la situation intérieure de l’Empire d'Occident, la seule qui nous laisse voir directement toute la misère du temps dans sa réalité atroce’ (HBE 1. 344). Stein devotes more than three pages to describing some of Salvian’s structures or the oppressiveness of Roman rule in the West in his day, and he points out that some of these are reflected in an exactly contemporary edict, of Valentinian III (Nov. Fall. X. pr., and 3. A.D. 441): see Stein (185, 347). To this I would add another edict, issued seventeen years later by the Emperor Majorian, which I have summarised in Section iv of this chapter (Nov. Maj. II. 2. A.D. 458). Although, as I have already made clear in my view (in vii.1), I regard Domesday as
The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World

being primarily a religious movement and not an expression of social protest, there is no doubt that it contained a strong element of such protest, simply because the class of large landowners in north Africa (including Numidia, where the concentration of Donatists was highest) was overwhelmingly Catholic. The role of the Catholic Church in north Africa in the later Roman Empire has been admirably described in the great book on Vandal Africa by Christian Constantin (V A Part I, ch. ii, § 4, esp. 132, 135-44). As he says, 'L'Afrique du V siècle ne demeure romaine que par la double appui de l'aristocratie foncière et de l'Église catholique qui s'accordent pour assurer à l'État le minimum de puissance indispensable à la leur' (132, cf. 144). The Circumcellians, the militant wing of the Donatists (sometimes appearing, if we are not seriously misinformed, as a kind of lusitani fringe, bent on religious suicide), waged open war on occasion not only upon the Catholic Church in Africa but also upon the class of large landowners from which that Church derived its main support. The war cry of these men, Deo laudare ('Praise be to God'; it often appears on Donatist tombstones), was more to be feared, according to St Augustine, than the lion's roar (Enarr. in Ps 132.6, in CCL, Ser. Lat. XL [1896] 1930). But these fanatics, barbarous as they might seem to the landless class, were anything but a terror to the poor, for we hear of them threatening to punish moneylenders who exacted payment from the peasants, and forcing landlords to dismount from their carriages and run before them while their slaves drove, or to do slaves' work at their tolls (Oppas, D i. 4, Ep. 158 [ed. 185] iv. 15; cf. 88-8 etc.).

There are clear indications that the regime of the Vandals set up upon their conquest of Roman north Africa in 429 and the years following was less extortionate than the Roman system existing there, from the point of view of the coloni. Constitutions issued by Justinian in 532 and 558, many years after his reconquest of north Africa in 533-4, show that during the Vandal period many coloni must have achieved some kind of freedom by escaping from the estates where they were in the condition of serfs; see Corp. Int. Civil. III [Nov. Just.] 799-803, Append. 6 and 9. (There is also reason to think that in other Germanic kingdoms humble Greeks and Romans may have found themselves better off.) Although the Ostrogoths, for example, could sometimes - like other 'barbarians' - behave with great cruelty to the inhabitants of captured towns, even indulging in general massacre and enslavement, their rule might sometimes seem at least no worse than that of the Roman landowners, as it evidently did in Italy in the 5th c. during the reign of Totila the Ostrogoth (541-52), who in the area under his control treated the peasants particularly well (Procop., Bell. V 7 = Goth. III, xi, 1, cf. vi. 5, 5), in strong contrast with those (apart perhaps from Belisarius) who commanded the Roman army sent by Justinian. Totila made the peasants pay their rents as well as their taxes to himself. He also accepted into his army a considerable number of slaves who had belonged to Roman masters, and he firmly refused to hand them over. He is also credited with representing most successfully to the peasants of Lucania, who had been organised into a military force against him by the great landowner Tullianus (see IV, iv 7, below), that if they returned to their/return to the cultivation of their lands their landlords would become theirs (Bell. VII = Goth. III, xxvi. 20-1). All this material comes from Procopius, who was personally present as a member of the staff of Belisarius. In the light of this information, it is easy to understand the particularly nauseating way in which Totila is referred to by Justinian in his so-called 'Pragmatic Sanction' of 554, which (among other things) ordered everything done by Totila, including his 'donations', to be abrogated (§ 2), confiscated property to be restored (§ 13-14), marriages between free persons and slaves to be dissolved at the wish of the free party (§ 15), and slaves and coloni who had passed into the possession of others to be returned to their original masters (§ 16). The statement by Jones that 'the mass of the Africans and Italians welcomed thearrivée of Justinian is far from being justified even by the few passages he is able to quote from Procopius, a witness who would naturally have been glad to find evidence of friendliness towards the armies of which he himself was a member.

At the very end of the sixth century we find Pope Gregory the Great writing to Coriscani and Campanians decreeing to the Lombards (Ep. V, 38 X, 5, ed. L. M. Hartmann, Lii 326-6 and II 240-). In the seventh century we hear from the Chronicle of Bishop John of 'Nikaia of Egyptians describing to the Arabs. The conquest by the Arabs, first of Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia and part of Armenia (not to mention the Persian empire), and then of Egypt, was accomplished with astonishing speed within a decade: Syria etc. between 634 and 636, and Egypt by 642. This startling process was no doubt facilitated by the previous large-scale Persian attacks (under their King Chosroes II) on the eastern provinces of the Roman empire in the quarter-century beginning in 604; they overran Mesopotamia, Syria and parts of Arabia; and between 616 and 620 they devastated many parts of Asia Minor; and in 617-18 they conquered Egypt and held it for some ten years. These lands were not entirely freed from the Persian danger until 629, the year after Chosroes was murdered in a coup. Although the surviving sources for all these events are very unsatisfactory and some of the dates are only approximate, the general outline is reasonably secure; but it is impossible to say how far the Arab victories during the next few years were due to the discouragement, exhaustion, damage and loss of life caused by the Persian invasions. The Arab conquest certainly deserve much more space than it can give here, since they were evidently due in large part to the old internal weaknesses of the Later Roman Empire, especially of course class oppression, and including most religious strife and persecution. Not only did the exploitation of the many for the benefit of the few continue as before (if not on quite the same scale as it had done in the West); the hostility between the various Christian sects, especially now between the Manichees of Syria and Egypt (the Jacobites and Sibylline books) and the Chalcedonian 'Orthodox', seriously reduced the will to resist the Arabs on the part of the populations of Syria and Egypt, which were predominantly Manichee and had suffered much persecution on that account. Michael the Syrian, the Patriarch of Antioch at the end of the twelfth century, speaking on behalf of his Jacobite brethren about the Arab conquest, says, 'it was no small advantage to us to be delivered from the cruelty of the Romans [the Byzantines], their wickedness, their fury, their implacable zeal against us, and to find ourselves at peace.' (Chom IX, 3 in.). The same statement was made in the thirteenth century by Bar Hebræus (Gregory Abūl Faraj, or Abulpharagius), another Syrian Jacobite historian, who used Michael as one of his principal sources (Chron. Ecles., Sectio 150). I feel I should emphasise here that for the seventh
century in particular Syriac sources are often essential for the Roman historian; for those who (like myself) do not read Syriac, translations are often available, into Latin or a modern language. There is fortunately an excellent account of all the main editions and translations by S. P. Brock, 'Syriac sources for seventh-century history', in Byzantium and Modern Greek Studies 2 (1976) 17-36.

I know of no good evidence that the Syriac Christians actually helped the Arab invaders, whom they naturally feared and hated as infidels until they discovered that the Muslims were prepared in general to allow them to practise their own particular form of Christianity (as the Byzantines were not), provided they paid a poll-tax for the privilege. As for the Egyptian Copts, most of them seem also to have regarded their conquerors at first with swearing and horror. Duchesne was clearly right to say that their sentiments were hostile to the 'empire persecutum' rather than favourable to the infidel invader. But some of them soon came to regard the rule of the Muslims, who as a rule were far more tolerant towards their subjects in religious matters, as a lesser evil than that of the persecuting Orthodox - the 'Melkites', or 'Emperor's men', as they called them. Even A. J. Butler, who in his history of the Arab conquest of Egypt (still a 'standard work') is eager to defend the Copts against any unfair charge of treachery and desertion to the Arab side, is obliged to admit that from 641 onwards the Copts did on occasion give assistance to the Arabs, notably when the Byzantine reconquest of Alexandria in 645-6 was forcibly terminated - and the whole of Egypt was lost to the Greek world for ever. 35 Butler also records the comments of Bar Hebraeus (Chron. Eccles. Sectio 1.50) on the temporary restoration to the Mesopotamian and Syrian Monophysites in the early seventh century, by the Persian King Chosroes II, of the churches which had been taken from them and handed over to the Orthodox by the persecuting Chalcedonian Bishop Domitians of Melitene (for whom see n. 34 again; Bar Hebraeus was here reproducing Michael the Syriac, Chron. X. 25). Michael and Bar Hebraeus regarded the Persian conquest of Mesopotamia (605, maintained until 627-8) as a divine punishment on the Chalcedonians for their persecution of the Jacobites - in their eyes; of course, the Orthodox. And Butler adds, 'It is the old story of Christians sacrificing country, race, and religion in order to triumph over a rival sect of Christians' (see n. 37 again).

It was not only towards rival sects within Christianity that the Christians gave vent to their religious animosity. The restitution to Jerusalem in 630 of what was believed to be the 'True Cross', carried off by the victorious Persians in 614 and now taken back from them by the Emperor Heraclius, was followed by a severe persecution of the Jews, who were accused of participating in the massacre of Christians at Jerusalem which had followed its capture by the Persians in 614. The consequences were soon to be unfortunate for the Roman empire, for when the Arabs attacked Syria and Palestine in the 630s the Jews evidently received them favourably and in some places gave them significant support. 36

A large number of 'barbarians', mainly Germans, achieved high positions in the Roman world through service in the army in the fourth century and later. As early as the mid-fourth century Arbino, who had enlisted as a common soldier (sagritus miles), reached the most exalted of all military ranks, that of magister
and most fruitful country areas, is said by Ammianus to have remarked that he 'kept peace with walls' (XXXI.6.4). Many other passages testify to the inability of 'barbarians' to capture towns and their consequent preference for the ravaging of rural areas. Besides, many towns were garrisoned. But in the article published in 127 which I have already utilised above (see nn. 3, 15, 18), Thamires has emphasized the rarity of recorded cases of the ravaging of towns. As he says, we hear much in the valuable Chronicle of Hydatius of the ravaging of north-western Spain by the Suevi, and in the Life of Severus (who died in 42) by Eugippius (511) of the depredations of the Rugii in Noricum Ripense (part of modern Austria), but we never hear of any organised resistance by the provincial population. And he continues.

Eugippius makes it clear that the Noricans, even when there were imperial troops stationed among them, and still more when there were none, were incapable of making any collective effort to check the ravages of the invader. They never tried to ambush them, or to sink their boats as they crossed the Danube, or to launch punitive raids across the great river into the territory of those who were tormenting them. One or two forts in Galicia [in north-west Spain] took up an aggressive defence against the Sueves and inflicted some losses upon them; but in general the picture there was one of helplessness and despair, just as it is in Noricum. 43

It was not only the very poor who became victims of the 'barbarians'. At the very highest level of society, needless to say, any outright treasonable conduct, whether against the empire or a 'barbarian' state, was punished more severely. Thus, the случаях of two cases known to Jones in 469 Arvandus, praetorian prefect of the Gauls in 464-8, and soon afterwards Senatorius, who was either governor of Aquitania Prima or vicar of the Gallic diocese of the Sertium Provinciae. Both these men - no doubt, as Jones says, 'despising of the Empire' - were condemned (and Senatorius executed) for collaboration with the Visigothic King Euric. 45 We also hear of a few by no means lowly men who defected to the 'barbarians'. One or two of these evidently acted for reasons of personal advantage. Cratiagatius, for instance, a leading man of Nysia in Mesopotamia, who fled to Persia in 359, seems to have been motivated mainly by affection for his beautiful wife, who had been captured by the Persians, and by the prospect of being handomely treated by the Persian king, Shapur II. 46 And the bishop of Marous on the Danube, who in 441 betrayed his city to the Huns (who immediately destroyed it), seems to have been behaving in a scandalous manner, robbing Hun graves in breach of a treaty of 436; he probably handed over his city to escape being himself surrendered to the vengeance of the exasperated Huns (Priscus, tr. 2). But there seems to be no good reason to think that there was any treachery on the part of Bishop Epiphanius of Antioch just before the capture and sack of that city by King Chosroes I of Persia in 540 (Procop., Bell. II = Pers. II.46.16-25, vii.14-18, iv.16-17). The bishop of Bezabde in Mesopotamia also came under suspicion of having betrayed his city to the Persians in 360; but Ammianus, although he admits there was a prima facie case against the man, did not believe the accusation, and we must treat it as at best 'not proven' (Amm. XXVII.5.7-9). But even men of substance could be driven to defer, like the poor, by injustice and maltreatment. There is an instructive story in Ammianus about a very able man living in the Greek East named Antonius, who, after becoming a rich merchant, had taken a position as

accountant on the staff of the military governor (the dux) of the province of Mesopotamia, and had finally received the honorary rank of protector. Certain men of power (potentes, patres) were able through their command of patronage to victimize him and to compel him to acknowledge a debt, the right to enforce payment of which was by collusion transferred to the imperial treasury; and when the Comit of the Treasury (the comes aurum largitionum) pressed him hard, Antonius defected suddenly to Persia in 359, taking with him the fullest possible details of the Roman army and its resources and dispositions, and becoming the right-hand-man of King Shapur II, who was planning to invade Roman Mesopotamia (Amm. XVIII.5.1-3). vii.10; xvii.5-6. x.3 XIX.3.18 (see 7-8, XX. iv. 1). At a later point with the Roman general Ursinus (the patron of Ammianus), Antonius protested vehemently that he had not deserted the Graeco-Roman world voluntarily, but only because he had been persecuted by his iniquitous creditors, whom even the great Ursinus had been unable to hold in check. At the end of their colloquy Antonius withdrew in the most respectful manner, 'not turning around but facing Ursinus and deliberately walking back wards until he was out of sight' (XVIII.8.5-6) - a touching revelation of his reluctance to abandon the society in which he had lived, and his veneration for its leading men.

At least two men of some quality, one a doctor and the other a merchant, actually took refuge among - of all barbarian peoples - the Huns. A mid-fifth-century Gallic chronographic source chronologically records under the year 448 that a doctor named Eudoxius, 'clever but perverse' (consilii et sententiae ingenii), after being involved in a revolt of the Basacali, fled to the Huns (Chron. Min. 1.662). The other man is the subject of the fascinating story told by the historian and diplomat Priscus (55) of his meeting, during his embassy to the camp of Attila in 448 or 449, with an unnamed man from Greece who had once prospered as a merchant at Viminacium on the Danube (the modern Koszare) and married a very rich wife there, but had been captured by the Huns when they took the city in 441 and had then fought for the Huns, even against the Romans. Although freed by his captors, he had by preference stayed to live among the Huns. His scathing description of Graeco-Roman class society is reported by Priscus, a firm believer in the established order, with a grave, incredulous disapproval which makes the testimony all the more valuable. The Greek said that things were bad enough in war-time, but in peace they were even worse, because of heavy taxation, and unprincipled men inflict injuries, because the laws are not valid against everyone. . . . A transgressor who is one of the very rich is not punished for his injustice, while a poor man, who doesn't understand business, pays the legal penalty - that is, if he doesn't die before the hearing, so long is the course of lawsuits protracted, and so much is the money that is spent on them. The climate of misery, perhaps, is to have to pay in order to obtain justice. For no one will give a hearing to an injured man unless he pays money to the judge and his assistants'.

This was all too true. The Greek seems to have been thinking primarily of civil litigation. We must not expect to find many references to long-drawn-out civil suits, but we do hear of one which seems to have lasted for eighteen years. from A.D. 226 to 244, and another that was ended by the personal intervention of King Theodoric the Ostrogoth (who ruled in Italy from 493 to 526). After
The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World
dragging on allegedly for thirty years. The position in criminal cases was even worse, for the accused, if they had neither honorific status themselves nor a sufficiently influential patron, might spend long periods in prison, sometimes in appalling conditions. In a speech of Libanius, giving a distressing picture of prison life at Antioch, we hear of a case in which a group of villagers, suspected perhaps without good cause) of murdering a local landowner, spent many months in prison, where five of them actually died before the case was finally heard (Orati, XLV, esp. §§ 8-13, 25-6; see Jones, LRE, I: 521-2). Indeed, 'Roman criminal justice was in general not only brutal but inefficient' (id. 520-1).

The Greek was justified, too, in what he said about the venality of officials: all officials in the Later Roman Empire expected to be handsomely tipped, even—and perhaps especially—tax collectors. In a typically emotional edita, Constantine says, 'Let the grasping hands of the officials refrain; let them refrain, I say; for unless after this warning they do refrain, they shall be cut off by the sword' (CTh, L: 67, of 331). And he goes on to forbid their illicit tips, *sperulae* as they were called, a term which extended to many other types of payment, both forced and voluntary, including those made by patrons to their clients, or by benefactors to their fellow-townsmen or others (cf. V. vii above). It was an empty threat, however, as the officials must have known only too well. Only about twenty-five years after Constantine's death, in the reign of Julian, an inscription found at Timgad, recording the order of precedence at official functions in the province of Numidia (roughly the modern Algeria), actually lays down an official tariff of the tips which could be legally demanded by the officials of that province: they are expressed in terms of modii of wheat, from two to a hundred *modii*—say from a quarter of a bushel to about twelve bushels. One civil servant of the sixth century who had literary pretensions, John Lydus (John the Lydian), tells us that during his first years as an *exceptor* in the department of the praetorian prefecture, quite a minor post (although in an important department), he actually earned *sperulae* ('without sailing too close to the wind', perhaps) as much as a thousand solidi, thanks to the solicitude of his great patron, the Praetorian Prefect Zoticus (De magistr. III: 26-7). As an ordinary *exceptor*, his nominal initial salary would probably have been only around nine solidi, and although various additional fees and perquisites would have been available, he would not, without powerful backing, have come near earning a thousand solidi, unless he was prepared to indulge in corrupt practices to which the word *sperulae* would have been most inappropriate. John also mentions in the same passage that when he wrote a panegyric in verse in honour of his illustrious patron, the great man generously rewarded him with a gold solidus for every line of the poem—although perhaps generously is not quite the right word, for the money was paid out of public funds! (iv)

The collapse of much of the Roman empire in the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries

After the murder of Alexander Severus in 235 there ensued fifty years of unparalleled disaster for the empire, with a series of futile civil wars between rival claimants to the imperial position, barbarian invasions, and a plague which broke out in 251 and raged for some fifteen to twenty years, with even more disastrous consequences than the pestilence of the 160s. Only in 284-5, with the accession of the very able emperor Diocletian (late 284), was the situation temporarily stabilised, and it was not until 324 that the empire entered upon a long period of internal peace, with Constantine's victory over Licinius and the unchallenged supremacy of the Constantinian house. Even after this there were occasional short periods of intermittent warfare; but again in every case to contention for the imperial throne. As I insisted in Section 11 of this chapter, the civil wars of the third and fourth centuries, like those of the first and second, were all fought out between the respective claimants and their armies; not once is there any clear sign of an alignment of class forces corresponding to the opposition between the armies, and we must regard all these struggles, barbarian invasions as they sometimes were, primarily as attempts by individuals and factions within the governing class to acquire or retain control of the supreme power in the empire.

No doubt men driven desperate by oppression could sometimes be led to hope that a change of emperor might result in some improvement in their situation, and it need not surprise us, therefore, if we occasionally come across statements about the support given by humble men to some pretender to the imperial throne. Writing probably in the late 360s, the unknown author of a curious little treatise, known today as the Anonymous De delis bellicis, addressed to the reigning emperors (who, at that date, must be Valentinian I and Valens), speaks with evident disapproval of the greed of the rich, whose store of gold, he says (II: 2-3), meant that the houses of the powerful (potentes) were crammed full and their splendid gifts to the enhancement of the poor, the poorer classes of course being held down by force (towards which violence against the rich, all feelings of justice, they entrusted their revenge to crime. For they often inflicted for most severe injuries on the empire, lying waste the fields, breaking the peace with outbursts of brigandage, stirring up animosities and passing from one crime to another they supported usurpers (I have used the English version of E.A. Thompson, BRR, 1110).

The word here translated 'usurpers' is *pruuni*, the standard term for a would-be emperor who did not succeed in establishing his rule firmly and achieving recognition (cf. VI: vi above). Certainly, the worse the situation of the poor under a given emperor, the more likely they might be, a *priori*, to support some new pretender to the throne. But we must not be too impressed by the allegations which we occasionally meet with in literary sources that the followers of a particular pretender were— or at least included—the scum of the earth: such statements are part of the normal armory of ancient political propaganda. However, on any occasion in particular I would be prepared to take such statements seriously. We hear from Ammianus and Zosimus that many humble men joined in the rebellion of Procopius, in 365-6; and there is a good reason why discontent should have been greater than ever at this very time: taxation was especially severe. Taxation had always been recognised by the Roman government as the prime necessity for the maintenance of peace itself, as the Romans understood that term. In the words Tacitus puts into the mouth of the Roman general
The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World

Petilus Cenalis in 79. Without arms there can be no peace among peoples [pugno genitum], nor can there be arms without pay, or pay without taxation [taxeae: Hist. IV, 7.4]. And to the ludicrously optimistic picture of a coming Golden Age, put into the mouth of the Emperor Probus (276–82), the cessation of any need for soldiers leads directly to a world in which taxation can disappear (Hist. Aug. Probus 20.3.4, and 22.4–25.3, esp. 20.6, 23.2). Taxation, under the new system inaugurated by Diocletian, had steadily increased during the fourth century, and even Julian, who in Gaul is said to have reduced the tax on each cowpe to 25 solidi to 7 (Amm. Marc. XVI, 14–15), evidently made no reduction in the East during the short time he reigned there in 361–2. According to Theodotus, addressing the Emperor Valens in March 368, imperial taxation had doubled during the forty years before the accession of Valens in 364, and although Valens proceeded to halve it, he did so only in his fourth year, 367–8 (the year after the revolt of Procopius), keeping it unchanged until then (Ost. VIII 1.13ab). Furthermore, Valens' father-in-law Petronius (in whose office, we are not told) had made himself widely hated by his ruthless exactions of arrears of taxes, accompanied by torture, and going back, according to Ammianus, to the reign of the Emperor Aurelian (270–5), nearly a hundred years earlier (XXVI, 7.5–6). Ammianus attributes partly to detestation of Petronius the adhesion to Procopius of many of the common people (populus, vulgaribus ibid. 17). Similarly, Zosimus ascribes the widespread support in Africa for Firmus (who rebelled in 372 or 373) to the exactions of Romanus, the Kame Africae, in Mauritania (IV, 33.3) will return shortly to the subject of taxation.

One of the many little civil wars, between Constantius II and the 'unper Manentus, led to a major battle in 351 at Muria (near to the confluence of the Drave with the Danube) which may well have been the 'bloodiest battle of the century', as Stein has called it, with a total loss of life said—no doubt with much exaggeration, as usual—to have been 54,000. And there were innumerable wars on and over the frontiers, not only against barbarians like the Germans and Sarmatians in the north, and in the fifth century the Huns, as well as against the nomads of the desert who often attacked Egypt, Cyrenaica and the other north African provinces, but also against the Persians, who could be considered a civilised state comparable with the Roman empire itself, and who became much more menacing in the Sassanid period from 224 onwards (see IV, iv above). Julian's disastrous expedition against Persia in 363 involved perhaps the largest army ever assembled by a Roman emperor for a campaign across the frontiers, and the resulting losses in manpower and equipment, although they cannot be even approximately estimated, must have been catastrophic. Ordinary campaigns on the frontiers may not have resulted in a greater drain on the resources of the empire than occurred during peace time, for no doubt the prisoners and booty captured will have roughly balanced out the losses. Even war with Persia may have yielded a good profit on occasion, as for example in 298, but in general the long series of conflicts in the East must have greatly strained the economy of the empire. And of course when Roman territory from which recruits were customarily obtained was lost to 'barbarian invaders, as happened above all in the West in the early years of the fifth century, permanent damage was inflicted on the military strength of the empire (see esp. Jones, LREI 198).

It is indeed hard to estimate how much waste of resources occurred during wars: the army itself was a very great burden on those resources, if less in time of peace than during wars (cf. Section ii of this chapter, with its nn.14–15). One thing we can say with confidence: the army was now considerably enlarged beyond what it had been in the early Principate. The total paper strength of the army may have been about 400,000 or more, even in the Antonine period. When Septimius Severus raised three new legions for his campaign against the Parthians in 197, he was increasing the legioary army by about one per cent. Estimating the numbers of the armed forces is a very difficult task, especially as regards the auxiliary regiments (munitio), which evidently outnumbered the legions, and all I feel safe to say is that Diocletian and Constantine must have greatly increased the size of the army, to perhaps over half a million men. It is no wonder that Diocletian also began a thorough-going reform of the whole system of taxation, which was apparently far more effective in extracting from the working population—'the peasantry above all, of course—the much greater resources needed to enable the government to sustain its military and administrative machine. Further expansion of the army may have brought it up to more than 600,000 before the end of the fourth century. We happen to possess two sets of figures for total army strength, the nature of which may inspire more confidence than we can usually feel in such cases, because they are not in the usual very round numbers and therefore look as if they may go back ultimately to genuine army lists, whether they represent them accurately or not. Very few provincial governors, figures which add up to 430, are then in the sixth century by John Lydus (De men, 1.27) for the reign of Diocletian. (I would guess that they are from the earlier rather than the last part of that reign, during which I think the army grew considerably.) Attila and others perhaps c. 580, speaks of the army as numbering 465,000 'under the emperors of former times' (hypo tôn palai tôn basileion: Hist. V, 13–17), a phrase which must refer back to the time before the division of the empire in 395. All the figures I have given are likely, of course, to represent 'paper strength', but even if the lists were inflated (so seems very likely) by quite a large number of fictitious soldiers, whose pay and rations were simply appropriated by the officers responsible for the lists, it is the 'paper strength' which matters, as Jones has insisted (see n. 10 again), for it would have been those figures on which the actual issues of pay and allowances were based.

It was not only the army which grew under Diocletian and his successors: the civil service too was enormously enlarged, the greatest single expansion coming when Diocletian virtually doubled the number of provinces, to over a hundred. (For the provincial reorganisation, see esp. Jones, LREI III 391–94.) At the time of the Notitia Dignitatum, drawn up (in the form in which we have it) at the time of the division of the empire in 395 and revised in its Western section during the first quarter of the sixth century, there were, according to my calculation, 119 provinces. Now the total numbers of men employed in the imperial civil service were not really excessive, when we take into account the vast area of the empire and the number of officials (hereinae) concerned—those not only of provincial governors, but of the 'palaces ministries' (those serving the emperors directly), the praetorian prefects and their vicars of the civil dioceses, the two urban prefects (of Rome and Constantinople), the magistri militum and others. I would agree with Jones, whose knowledge of the evidence has never been
The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World
equaled, that 'the grand total of regular officials was not much in excess of 30,000, not an extravagant number for an empire which stretched from Hadrian's Wall to beyond the Euphrates'. But, as we shall see, the burden of the civil service upon the economy of the Roman world was out of all proportion to its numbers.

Even before the great growth in the numbers of the Christian clergy (which I deal with below) the army and the civil service represented a tremendous drain upon the resources of the Graeco-Roman world. In a sense many of the men concerned were performing essential functions in defence or administration. But they were all withdrawn from the productive process, and they had to be maintained by those who remained within the process, above all of course the peasants and slaves. Some of them — a high proportion of the superior officials, in particular — would already be members of the propertied class, who if they had not been involved in the administration would have been gentlemen of leisure, and to that extent an equal burden on the economy. But there is an essential fact here which it would be easy to overlook. Had civil servants been ordinary gentlemen of leisure, they would have been a burden, certainly, upon their own coloni and slaves. What made many of the civil servants an exceptionally heavy weight upon the economy as a whole was that they were able to extort, by means of their official position, a far greater surplus from the working population than they would have been able to do as mere private individuals.

Their opportunities for extortion naturally varied very greatly, and the higher a man rose in the service the more he could make. It was not so much the nominal salaries which were the lucrative part of top appointments: indeed, the fixed official salaries, largely owing to the great inflation of the third and fourth centuries, seem to have been distinctly lower in the Later Empire than in the Principate, even if the highest recorded salary in the Later Empire, the 100 pounds of gold paid annually to the Praetorian Prefect of Africa in Justinian's reign, is no less than eight hundred times that of an ordinary clerk. Officials enriched themselves primarily from extra-legal exactions of all kinds. As we saw in Section iii of this chapter, John the Lydian in his first year as a fairly humble clerk (though in a palatine ministry at Constantinople) boasted of having earned quite legally a sum which must have been something like a hundred times his nominal salary. This will have been altogether exceptional, because it was due to the patronage of one of the highest officials of the day, and no doubt the ordinary civil servant would have had to be content with much less, or else resort to questionable or even illegal means of extortion. But 'extra-legal' profits were evidently made from top to bottom of the administrative machine. In the fifth and sixth centuries it looks as if would-be governors of at least some provinces might be willing to spend on a bribe (afragium) that would procure them the office as much as or more than the salary it would bring them — a clear indication of the additional profits to be made out of the post (see Jones, LRE I.391-401, esp. 398-9).

The officials who were probably in the very best position of all to extract bribes, namely, the caballarii, the eumachii who, as slaves or freedmen, ministered to the sacred bedchamber of the emperor or empress, could sometimes make enormous fortunes. (I have said something about their influence and the wealth they could acquire in III. v above.) The corps of caballarii being closed to ordinary men, it was the other 'palatine' offices which were most sought after, and in some cases we hear not only of limits being placed on the number of men who could be admitted, called stantii, but also of superflumacarum, who either worked without salary or wanted to step into dead or retired men's shoes; we even find grades being established among these supernumeraries. At the lowest level, that of the officials of the provincial governors, known as scribes (over 10,000 in number), salaries were very low (see Jones, LRE II.594) and legal perquisites relatively small: this was the only part of the civil service which in theory a man could not have and in which his sons were also bound to serve (see Jones, RE 413). The lack of adequate official rewards may have driven many caballarii to forms of extortion which the law either did not sanction or positively forbade. I can best illustrate this by referring again to the astonishing law of Justinian in 531, applying to caballarii (taxicarii in Greek) as well as caballarii, which had occasion to mention in regard to inventarii at the end of Section ii of this chapter. As we saw there, Justinian's reason for prohibiting caballarii and inventarii from becoming bishops or priests was that they would have become habituated to the practice of extortion with violence and cruelty (CJ I.4.352, p. 1). The civil service, then, did not merely extract a surplus from the working population (and others); it appropriated a far larger amount than its relatively modest numbers might suggest. Armies and civil service together were a fearful burden on the Graeco-Roman economy. Given that the Roman empire was to be stabilised and strengthened, without any fundamental change in its nature, it was fortunate indeed in most of its tolerations from Diocletian to Theodosius I (284-395) that men could do, within their limits, they did. Sometimes, they appear in quite a heroic role. But, ironically enough, the very measures they took, necessary as they were if the system was to be maintained, helped to break up the empire, for the increases in army and civil service involved the extraction of an increased surplus from the already overburdened peasantry. Diocletian, as we have seen, thoroughly reorganised the system of taxation. Constantine added two entirely new taxes, one on senators, the tellis or collatio decennii (at rates which were relatively very low indeed), the other, the collatio lustralis or chrypygynon, on negotiatores, who included for this purpose not only traders but urban craftsmen who sold their own produce, fishermen, moneylenders, brothel-keepers and prostitutes. (For the distress allegedly caused by the collatio lustralis, see IV. vii. 1 above and its n. 7 below.) In the East, the former tax was abolished by Marcian in the early 450s (CJ XII n. 2), the latter by Anastasius in 498 (CJXII.1), dated by Joshi, Styl. Chron. 31).

In the preceding paragraph I have characterised the majority of the Roman emperors from Diocletian to Theodosius I as men who performed their functions as effectively as circumstances allowed, and even with some heroism. It is an ironic reflection that most of the later Roman emperors who served the empire most loyally were men who had risen from a lowly station in life. Diocletian himself was born a Dalmatian peasant, and his three colleagues in the Tetarchy (295 ff.) were also of Balkan peasant stock, including Constantius I, the father of Constantine, whose dynasty lasted until the death of Julian in 363. Valentinian I, who founded the next dynasty in 364, was the son of a Pannonian soldier of humble origins, who had risen from the ranks; and there were later...
emperors who were also of peasant stock, notably Justin I and his nephew Justinian I. Libanius, in a letter to Julian written about 365, could say that there had been 'not a few emperors of no mean intelligence who had lacked distinguished ancestry, and although they understood how to preserve the empire they were ashamed to speak of their parentage, so that it was quite a task for those who delivered encomiums of them to allude this name.' (Orat. XVIII.7). Members of the Roman upper class would apply to such men, and to leading generals and officials who could boast of no illustrious ancestors, contemptuous terms deriding their rustic origin, such as agricola, semiagricta, adagricola, adagricias. The first two of these words are used by (among others) the epimomator Aurelius Victor, a self-conceited parvenu, the son of a poor and uneducated man (Caes. 20.5), who nevertheless admits that all the members of the Tetrarchy, although enjoying little enough humanitas (culture) and reared to the hardships of rural life and military service, were of great benefit to the state (39.26). The senators on the other hand, he says, 'gloried in idleness and at the same time trembled for their wealth, the use and the increase of which they accounted greater than eternal life itself' (37.7). The Roman upper classes, indeed, could sometimes save themselves only by raising individual members of the most exploited class, the peasantry, to ruling positions, often because of their military competence and ability to command in campaigns. Needless to say, they took care to select only those whom they expected (usually with reason) to promote the interests of the upper classes, while maintaining their exploitation of the remainder. It was a form of 'social mobility' which involved no real danger to the ruling class.

Since the subject of this book is the Greek world, I ought perhaps to say something about individual Greeks who became Roman emperors. The first clear case of a 'Greek' emperor was the young Syrian, Eligabulus (or Helogabalus), born Varios Avitus Bassianus at Emesa in Syria, who as his texts ruled for four years (218-222) as M. Aurelius Antoninus under the auspices of his formidable mother, Julia Soaemias, until both were murdered by the praetorian guard. The Emperor Philip (M. Julius Severus Philippus, 344-9) came from what the Romans called 'Arabia'; he has been aptly described as 'the son of an Arab sheikh from the Trachonitis', south of Damascus (W. Enslin, in C.A.H. XII.87). For the next century and a half the emperors were all primarily Westerners, whose first language was Latin; and the setting up of a permanent Greek-speaking court at Constantinople came only with the last division of the empire into Eastern and Western parts on the death of Theodosius I in 395. After a succession of emperors in the East who may genuinely be described as Greek, another dynasty originating in the West ruled at Constantinople from 518 onwards, and under Justinian I (527-65) reconquered much of the Western empire. Nowadays little account is taken of the 'Latin' origins of Justin I, Justinian I and Justin II (518-78), but in the eyes of some later historians who wrote in Syriac, namely Michael the Syrian (died c.1000), who regarded the sixth century and (following him closely) Bar Hebraeus in the thirteenth, all the Roman emperors from Augustus to Justin II (565-78) were 'Franks' (meaning Germans), and their armies too; and these Syriac historians conceive a new 'Greek' Empire as

beginning only with Tiberius Constantine (574/5-582).

From the second decade of the fourth century onwards a new economic burden suddenly appeared, of a kind no one could previously have expected. With the adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the Greek-Roman world, by Constantine and his successors, the economy had to support an increasingly large body of clerics, monks and nuns, the vast majority of whom were not engaged in any economically productive activity and therefore whatever their spiritual value to the community must be counted, from the economic point of view, as so many 'idle mouths'. In the pagan world there had been very few professional, full-time priests, outside Egypt. Now, a vast and steadily growing number of Christian 'religious' had to be supported at public expense, in one form or another. It is true that most of the bishops, many of the priests and deacons and some of the minor clergy and monks were or had been wealthy men, who had never done any productive work and whose labour was consequently not an additional loss; but a good many of the monks and minor clergy came from the poorer classes and their labour was therefore withdrawn from production. Some of the monasteries were maintained by the labour of the monks themselves, but it is likely that more than a handful (mainly those in Egypt organised under the ascetic rule) produced a surplus beyond what they themselves consumed, and of course it was above all producers of a surplus that the Greek-Roman economy needed. It was to preserve its existing class structure. The number of monks and full-time clerics by the mid-fifth century must already have been many hundreds of thousands. In the sixth century, in the territory of Constantinople, there seem to have been over eighty monasteries, and in the Great Church of Constantinople alone, many more than the full establishment of 525 miscellaneous clerics (from priests to deacons and doorkeepers) to which the emperor then wished the numbers to be reduced (Nov. J. III. 1, of 539). These figures, for the capital city of the empire, are of course exceptional, but other substantial ones could be produced, above all for Egypt, where the monastic and eremotic movements flourished most of all.

I need scarcely dilate on the immense wealth of the one and only empire-wide organisation that existed apart from the imperial administration itself. I refer of course to the Christian Church. (I have pointed out in VII.A above that the historian is not the theologian, much less the apologist of the Church.) The income of the Church came largely from endowments provided by benefactors (nearly always, of course, in the form of landed estates), but also from regular contributions made by the state and from the offerings of the faithful. Of all the churches, Constantinian and his successors made of Rome the richest. Particulars given in the Liber Pontificalis (xxxix-xxxv) enable us to calculate that the estates settled on the Roman Church in the reign of Constantine alone brought in an annual income of well over 30,000 solidi (more than 100 pounds of gold). It is hardly surprising that according to St. Jerome the state and the Church produced a surplus of 300,000 pagi, and the Patriarch of Jerusalem was said to have a yearly income from his churches of 200,000 pounds of gold. This was a vast sum, but was not sufficient to enable the Emperor to give the Church the vast increase in influence and power it made necessary to support the Church at this time. In the sixth century and following this century the Church had become a powerful force in the political life of the empire, and it was not until the Byzantine emperor Arcadius (401-408) that the Church finally lost its political independence, and became a mere instrument of the Emperor's will.
which had to be supported by the overloaded Graeco-Roman agricultural economy. Whether the Church gave a good return for what it exacted is a question. I shall not enter into. It must be obvious that I believe it did not.

I have referred near the end of VII. above to some of the many deplorable episodes in the bitter strife among rival groups of Christians which so disfigures the history of the Christian Roman Empire. Such events seem to many of us to cast thorough discredit upon the claim of Christianity to constitute a divine revelation. This verdict can hardly be met except by recourse to the machinations of a Devil, or by the specious claim — made repeatedly by Christians on all sides in antiquity (see VII. above), but disastrous in its consequences — that there is only one real Christian Church and that all other men and women who may regard themselves as Christians are heretics or schismatics who cannot be accounted Christian at all. If we are to decide whether Christianity strengthened or weakened the Roman empire we must set off the social cohesion it undoubtedly produced within individual sects against the discord between the sects. The former was surely stronger than anything known in paganism; the latter was unknown to paganism. I find it hard to make a comparative evaluation of the two countering tendencies of Christianity that I have just mentioned; but I believe that the latter (the production of discord) was far more powerful than most historians have realised (or at least have been willing to admit) and that over the centuries it was probably the stronger of the two. Religious strife continued sporadically, not only within the Byzantine empire (most trenchantly displayed and concluded controversy in the eighth and ninth centuries) but between Rome and Constantinople. In 1054 the interminable schism between Pope and Patriarch became effectively final. An attempt to heal it was made by the Byzantine Emperor John VIII and his leading bishops, who submitted to Rome at the Council of Florence in 1439, in the vain hope of obtaining Western help against the now serious threat from the Ottoman Turks. But even the emperor and his bishops were unable on their return to overcome the deep hatred of Rome in the Byzantine world, and the reunion collapsed. The last Byzantine emperor, Constantine XI, made a desperate but fruitless attempt to heal the breach at the end of 1452, a few months before Constantinople finally fell to the Turks. The historian Ducis records with disappointment the opinion expressed in Constantinople in 1453 by a most distinguished man (who shared the later views of Gennadius) that it would be better to have the Sultan’s turban in Constantinople than the Pope’s mitre (XXXVII.10).

It was, I suggest, the combination of unlimited economic power and political power in the hands of the propertied class, their emperor and his administration which ultimately brought about the disintegration of the Roman empire. There was nothing to restrain the greed and ambition of the rich, except in so far as the emperor himself might feel it necessary to put a curb on certain excesses in order to prevent a general or local collapse, or simply in order that the population of the empire, under a just regime, might be prosperous enough to be able to pay their taxes promptly — a motive which can be seen clearly in numerous imperial constitutions (cf. below).

For the peasant, it was the tax collector who was the cause of the greatest dread.
The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World

What a terrifying individual he could be is nicely illustrated in one of those Lives of Saints from which so much of our information about the lives and outlook of the poor in the Later Roman Empire is derived: the Life of St. John the Almsgiver, from which I have quoted above. If we want to characterise a cruel and merciless person, we sometimes say, 'He's like a wild beast'. Well, the Saint is represented as thinking about the dreadful monsters he may meet after death, and the only way he can adequately express the appalling ferocity of these wild beasts is to say that they will be 'like tax-collectors' [106]. Certainly, tax collection from the poor in Roman times was not a matter of polite letters and, as a last resort, a legal action beating-up defaulters was a matter of routine, if they were humble people. A casual remark of the fifth-century ecclesiastical writer Theodoret shows us what the procedure of tax-collection was likely to be in a Syrian village: 'At this time,' he says, 'collectors (pollutores) arrived, who compelled them to pay their taxes and began to imprison some and maltreat others' (Hist. relig. 17; cf. Eunapius, fr. 87). In Egypt the same brutal procedure can be seen at work: local officials would seize taxpayers whom they alleged (rightly or wrongly) to be in default, imprison and ill-treat them, and, with the aid of soldiers and local levies, burn down their houses. After quoting a particular example of such a procedure, from the reign of Justinian, Sir Harold Bell (a leading papyrologist and historian of Graeco-Roman Egypt) remarks, 'Such, to judge by other evidence, were regular accompaniments to the process of collecting arrears of taxes from an Egyptian village in the sixth century' [EBA 34]. According to Ammianus, an Egyptian governor in the late fourth century would blush for shame in presence of the scars on his back inflicted by the tax-collector's whip (peneustum apud eos, sibi quidem infliciendo tributa plumas: in corpore videnti ostendit: XXII. xxv. 23). And it is worth repeating here the statement of Ammianus which I quoted near the end of V. iii above, that the Emperor Julius limited it was no good granting remissions of tax arrears in Gaul in the 380s, because this would only benefit the rich; the poor would have been made to pay immediately and in full (XVI. v. 18). There must have been many occasions, too, on which hapless peasants were forced to pay their taxes twice over, whether because the tax had first been extracted from them by the agents of a 'usurer' (cf. VI. vi above), or because their landlord, after collecting the tax, became insolvent before paying it over to the authorities (or to the persons to whom he was responsible). There is an example of the latter situation in a letter of Pope Gregory the Great, written in 591, from which we learn that the nusticii on an estate of the Roman Church in Sicily had been compelled to pay their burden twice to the head leesse, Theodosius, now almost insolvent. Gregory, an exceptionally conscientious landlord, orders that the 57 pounds concerned are to be repaid to the peasants as a prior claim against Theodosius' estate (Ep. I.42).

It will be objected that the appalling situation I have been describing is characteristic only of the Later Empire, and that things were surely very different under the Principate, especially in the first two centuries of the Christian era. Certainly, taxation became much heavier in the fourth century onwards (cf. above, and Section iii of this chapter). But there is no reason to think that defaulting taxpayers who were poor men, especially peasants, would be much better treated in the first century than in the fourth, although, until certain of the privileges of the Roman citizenship became in practice limited to the upper classes, during the second century (see Section i of this chapter), the Roman citizen who was a person of no consequence might occasionally be able to assert his legal rights. (St. Paul did so, as we have seen - but of course he was far from being an uneducated peasant.) The native villager, especially if he was not a Roman citizen (as very few villagers were in the Greek-speaking part of the empire before 212), would have had little chance of escaping any brutal treatment while the last vestiges of authority in the empire were in the hands of the Gladiators.) There is a certain amount of evidence pointing in this direction, of which I will single out one text, quoted by several modern writers. [107] Philo of Alexandria writes of events which he represents as having taken place 'recently' and therefore presumably during the reign of Tiberius, 14-37, apparently in Lower Egypt, [108] as a result of the activity of a rapacious and cruel tax-collector:

When some who appeared to be defaulting merely through sheer poverty took to flight, in dread of severe punishment, he terrorised their women and children and parents and other relatives, beat them, and subjected them to every kind of outrage. Although they were unable either to reveal the fugitive's whereabouts or (because of their own destruction) to pay what was due from him, he pursued, torturing them and putting them to death in a cruel manner. Others committed suicide to avoid such a fate. When there were no relations left, he extended his outrages to neighbours and sometimes even to villages and towns, which were rapidly deserted by the flight of their inhabitants to places where they hoped to escape detection (De spir. by. III. 158-63).

Even if we make the necessary allowance for Philo's characteristic exaggeration, a grim picture emerges; and, as Bell has said, 'records found in Egypt have brought us proof that there is substantial truth in Philo's statements' (EAGAC 77-8). We must admit, with Philo, that such outrages, not only against the property but against the bodies and even the lives of those unfortunate who are seized in substitution for the actual debtors are only too likely when the annual collection of taxes is in the hands of "men of barbarous nature, who have never tasted of human mercy and are obeying tyrannical orders" (ibid.).

Some of the numerous complaints about taxation in the literary sources for the Later Roman Empire are of course over-coloured; their exaggerations are often traceable to political or religious satire, or to a desire to flatter the current emperor by damning his predecessors. However, anyone who is inclined to discount the admittedly very rhetorical evidence of the literary sources should read some of the imperial legislation. A particularly interesting specimen is the Second Novel (issued on 11 March 439) of the last great Western emperor, the young Majorian, of whom Stein said that we could 'admit in him without reserve the last figure possessing a real grandeur in the history of the West' (HIE F. 3.375). Although this Novel was issued only in the West, the situation it depicts, mutatis mutandis, prevailed also in the Greek East, where the oppression of the vast majority was effected in ways that were basically similar, even if it did not reach quite the same degree of intensity. The Novel is well worth reading as a whole: but it is long, and I can do no more than summarise parts of it. There is a full translation in Pharr, TC 551 s, 3.) The Novel is entitled 'On the remission of arrears of tax' (De indulgentia restituendis. It begins by stressing the woes of the provincials, whose fortunes are said to have been enfeebled and worn down, not only by the exaction of the various forms of
The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World

regular tribute but also by extraordinary fiscal burdens (extraordinaria mensa, suprinutilis talia), and the necessity of purchased dementors — by bribing officials. A neat abstract phrase, "no impagiable devotis, characterizes the plight of the landowner (patronus), drained of resources (exhaustus) and unable to discharge his arrears of tax, when confronted with yet another demand that 'dutiful as he is, he cannot fulfill.' With the exception of one minor tax in kind, a general remission of arrears is granted (§ 1), explicitly for the benefit of the landowners (possessoribus), who are conceived as responsible for all taxes. Even if payment has been undertaken by someone else (no doubt at a high rate of interest), perhaps on the faith of a solemn promise by stipulatibus by the taxpayer, the latter is still to have relief (cf. Nie. Mar. II.2). The Novell goes on to boast (§ 2) that the emperor has "put an end to the harshness of the ferocious tax collectors'. There is a bitter complaint that the states of the highest officials of the state (those of the praetorian prefects are singled out) range around the provinces, and 'by enormous exactions terrorise the landowner and the decurion', accounting for only a small proportion of the taxes they collect and, greedy and swollen with power as they are, extorting twice as much or more by way of commission (propinca) for themselves (cf. Jones, LRE I 468). In the good old days, Majarian adds, tax collection had been carried out, through the local councils, by the office staff of the provincial governor, who were fairly humble men and whom the governor could keep in order. But now the collection was in the hands of emissaries of the central 'palatine' administration, described by the emperor as 'terrible with the prestige of their exalted official rank, raging against the vultas of the provincials, to the mercy of their proud, overbearing, and official behaviour of the financial officials, are deserting their country estates, as they are faced not merely with the loss of their fortunes but with 'severe imprisonment and cruel tortures' inflicted upon them by the merciless officials for their own profit, with military aid. The collection of taxes must be entrusted once more to the provincial governors, and there must be no more interventions by palatine officials and the military, except to encourage governors to do their duty. The emperor stresses again (§ 3) that he is making this ordinance as a remedy for the landowner (pro remedio possessoris). He proceeds to complain also (§ 4) of 'the men of power' (potentiores personae), whose agents throughout the provinces neglect to pay their taxes, and who remain contumaciously on their estates, secure against any summons in the fear inspired by their arrogance. The agents and overseers of those families which are 'senatorial or powerful' must submit themselves to the jurisdiction of the provincial governors (as they had not been doing), and so must the local agents in charge of estates belonging to the imperial household. Moreover (§ 5), provincial governors must not be subjected to molestation by false accusations from the staffs of the great officers of state, who will be furious at having enormously profitable spoils wrested from their own fraudulent grasp.

Some other laws of the fifth and sixth centuries unloose similar streams of

righteous indignation, at much the same objectives; see, for example, Valentinian III's Novell 1.3.2 (of 496), followed in § 3 by an ingenious remark which reveals the main reason for the emperor's solicitude for the possessores: 'A landowner who has been made poor is lost to us; one who is not overburdened is useful to us.' There are several similarly revealing laws, notably, for the East, the long Eighth Novel of Justinian, of A.D. 528, on which I have remarked elsewhere (SVP 47-8). Justinian too is concerned lest excessive exploitation by the great men, and their imposition of extraordinary burdens, should impair the ability of his subjects to pay their regular taxation, which he calls not only 'acustomed and legal' but also 'prius' (nolutur priori, Nov. VIII. Prag. pr. §). Similarly, the anxiety shown by Justinian in a series of three Novella in 535 to protect the free peasants of the praetorian prefecture of Illyricum and the provinces of Thrace in Euminus and Moesia Secunda against money-lenders (Nov. XXXII-IV) is very likely to have been due in large part to anxiety to preserve them as an important source of recruitment for the army, as we know they were in his reign. The laws have been describing nicely illustrate the most fundamental reason why it was necessary to have an emperor in the first place — a subject I have briefly discussed in VI vi-vi. The Principate was accepted (if at first with some grumbling) by the Roman (and Greek) privileged classes because on the whole they realised that their own privileged position might be imperilled if two million individuals among their number were allowed, as in the Later Republic, to plunder the empire too freely. If that happened, civil wars (accompagned, as they could well be, by proscriptions and confiscations) and even perhaps revolutions from below might destroy many of them. The situation could hardly be put better than in Machiavelli's statement, which I have quoted, about the necessity for having, 'where the material is so corrupt, ... besides laws, a superior force, such as appoints to a monarch, who has such absolute and overwhelming power that he can restrain excesses due to ambition and the corrupt practices of the-powerful' (see VI vi above, referring to the 'Discourses on the First Decade of Livy I.55), and cf. Machiavelli's advice to Henry Tudor (grantamur, quoted in IV.33 above, ad init.). In the Later Empire, the potentes, potentiores or dynastes, the men of power, became harder to control and often defied or circumvented the emperors with impunity. Senators, at once the richest and the most influential group in the empire, were more easily able than anyone to delay or avoid payment of their taxes and the fulfillment of their other liabilities. This was true even in the Eastern part of the empire. In 307, for example, an edict of the Emperor Arcadius, addressed to the praetorius prefect of the East, complained that in some provinces half of the taxes due there were 'lacking' (CTh vii.4). In the West, where the senators were even richer and more powerful, this situation was worse. In the very same year, 397, when the revolt of Gildo in Africa had imperilled the coin supply of Rome itself, three very significant laws were issued in the West, where the young Emperor Honorius was dominated by his able magister militum Stilicho. The first, in June, ordered that not even imperial estates should be exempted from the obligation to supply recruits in person (CTh VII.33.12). The second and third, in September and November, weakly conceded, in response to senatorial objections, that senators alone (even if head lessees of imperial estates) should have the right to commute their liability to
The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World

supply recruits and pay in gold instead (ibid., 13-14). And as late as the early sixth century we find an edict drafted by Cassiodorus for Theodoric the Ostrogoth, then king of Italy, deploiring the fact that Roman senators, who ought to be setting an example, had paid virtually none of the taxes due from them, thus leaving the poor (the mean) to bear an intolerable burden (Cassiod., Var., II. 24-25).

The text I have been quoting illustrate very well how the government was continually frustrated in such attempts as it did make (for whatever reasons) to protect the peasantry by the fact that the more important of the officials on whom it was obliged to rely for carrying out its orders were themselves members of the upper class, and of course felt an instinctive sympathy with its other members and often connived at their malpractices, and indeed were guilty of much extortion themselves. The rulers of the empire rarely if ever had any real concern for the poor and unprivileged as such; but they sometimes realised the necessity to give some of their protection (as we have just seen), either to prevent them from being utterly ruined and thus become useless as taxpayers, or to preserve them as potential recruits for the army. Try as they would, however, the emperors had no choice: but to act through the officials I have just characterised as members of the exploiting class. No text that I know speaks more eloquently of the defects of this system than a Novel of the Emperor Romanus II issued between 959 and 963: "We must beware lest we send upon the unfortunate poor the calamity of law-officers, more merciless than famine itself."

Over all, no one I think will doubt that the position of humbler folk in the Graeco-Roman world became distinctly worse after the early Principate. I have described in Section I of this chapter how their Reichsfreiheit deteriorated during the first two centuries; and in Section II I have shown how even the lower ranges of the curial order (falling only just inside, and sometimes perhaps even a little below, my 'propered class') were subjected to increasing fiscal oppression from the second half of the second century onwards, and during the latter part of the fourth century lost at least one of their most valuable privileges: exemption from flogging. It need not surprise us when we are told that in the numerous papyri of the Later Roman Empire from the Oxyrhynchus area the use of the Greek word δάνεω, once the standard technical term for 'slave', is almost confined to occasions on which humble members of the free population are referring to themselves when addressing people of higher standing (see IV, ii n. 41 below).

I hope it is now clear how I would explain, through a class analysis, the ultimate disintegration of a large part of the Roman empire—albeit of course a Greek core, centred above all in Asia Minor, did survive for centuries. I would keep firmly in view the process of exploitation which is what I mean primarily when I speak of a 'class struggle'. As I see it, the Roman political system (especially when Greek democracy had been wiped out: see V, iii above and Appendix IV below) facilitated a most intense and ultimately destructive economic exploitation of the great mass of the people, whether slave or free, and it made radical reform impossible. The result was that the propered class, the men of real wealth, who had deliberately created this system for their own benefit, drained the life-blood from their world and thus destroyed Graeco-Roman civilisation over a large part of the empire—Britain, Gaul, Spain and north Africa in the fifth century; much of Italy and the Balkans in the sixth; and in the seventh, Egypt, Syria and Mesopotamia, and again north Africa, which had been re-conquered by Justinian's generals in the sixth century. That, I believe, was the principal reason for the decline of Classical civilisation. I would suggest that the causes of the decline were above all economic and social. The very hierarchial political structure of the Roman empire, of course, played an important part, but it was precisely the propered class as such which in the long run monopolised political power, with the definite purpose of maintaining and increasing its share of the comparatively small surplus which could be extracted from the primary producers. By non-Marxist historians this process has normally been described as if it were a more or less automatic one, something that 'just happened'. If one wants to find a terse, vivid, epigrammatic characterisation of something that happened in the Roman world, one naturally turns first to Gibbon. And indeed, in the excursus at the end of his 36th chapter, entitled 'General observations on the Fall of the Roman empire in the West', there occurs the expressive sentence, 'The stupendous fabric yielded to the pressure of its own weight.' In Peter Brown's sometimes brilliant little book, The World of Late Antiquity (1971), there is a metaphor of a rather different kind, which equally expresses the basic idea of something that was essentially both inevitable and grotesque. 'Altogether, the prosperity of the Mediterranean world seems to have drained to the top' (34, my italics).—Brown is speaking of the fourth century, and he has just mentioned that in the western part of the empire, in that century, the senatorial aristocracy was 'five times richer, on the average, than the senators of the first century'. (In the Greek East, things were not so very different, although the senatorial class was not quite so extravagantly opulent as in the West.) If we were in search of a metaphor to describe the great and growing concentration of wealth in the hands of the upper classes, I would not incline towards anything so innocent and so automatic as drainage. I should want to think in terms of something much more purposive and deliberate—perhaps the vampire bat. The burden of maintaining the imperial military and bureaucratic machine, and the Church, in addition to a licensed class consisting mainly of absentee landlords, fell primarily upon the peasantry, who formed the great bulk of the population and, ironically enough (as I have already explained), the remarkable military and administrative reorganisation effected by a series of very able emperors from the late third century to the end of the fourth (from Diocletian and Constantine to Theodosius I) succeeded in creating an even greater number of economically 'idle mouths' and thus increased the burdens upon an already overburdened peasantry. The peasants were seldom able to revolt at all, and never successfully; the imperial military machine saw to that. Only in Gaul and Spain did the Basae cause serious if intermittent trouble over several generations (see Section III of this chapter). But the merciless exploitation of the peasants made many of them receive, if not with enthusiasm at least with indifference, the barbarian invaders who might at least be expected—vainly, as it usually turned out—to shatter the oppressive imperial financial machine. Those who have been chastised with scorpions may hope for something better if they think they will be chastised only with whips.