



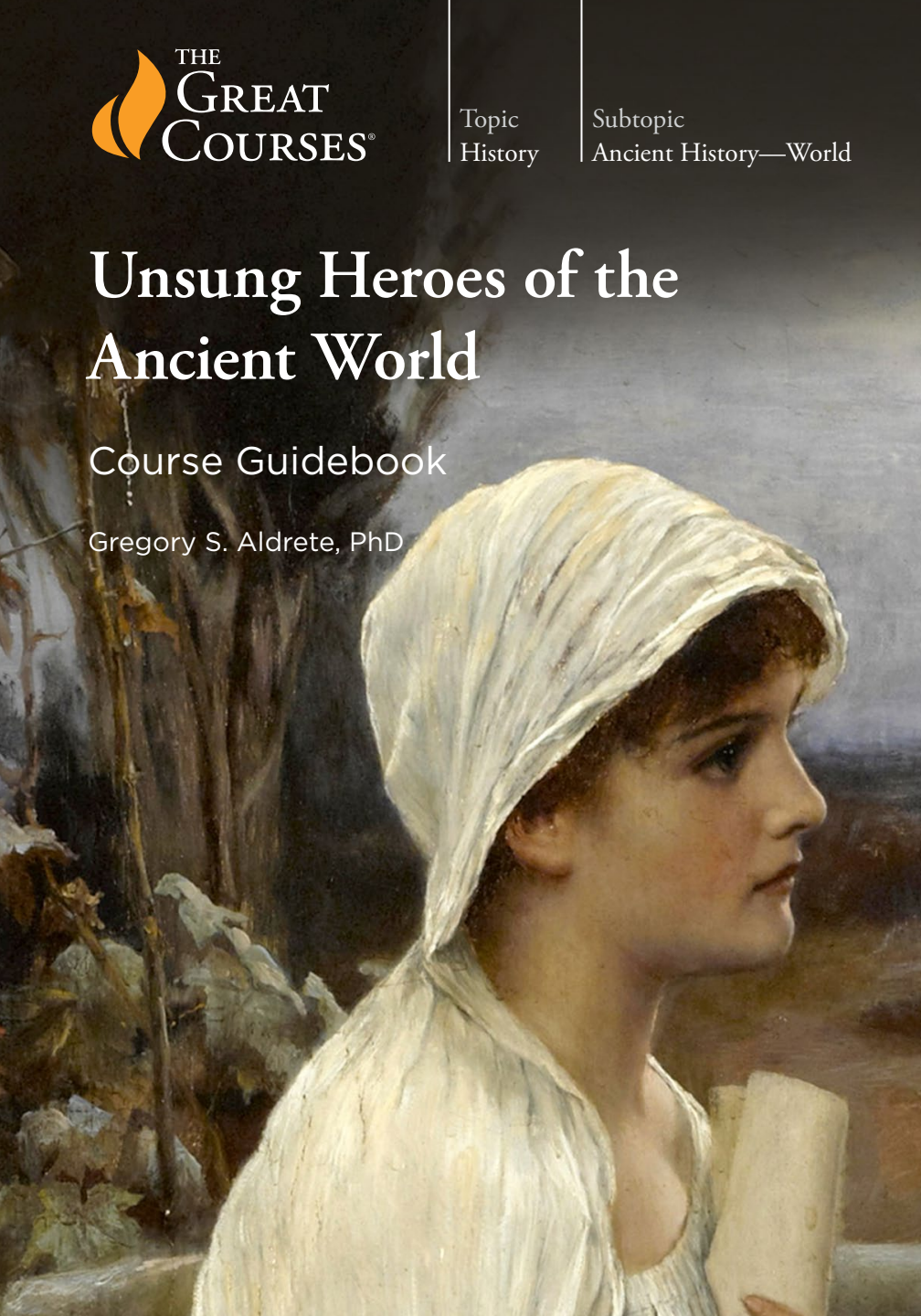
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# Unsung Heroes of the Ancient World

Course Guidebook

Gregory S. Aldrete, PhD





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# 1



## Cimon of Athens: From Glory to Disgrace

**T**he exploits of people like Julius Caesar, Socrates, Augustus, Cleopatra, and Alexander the Great have been celebrated for millennia, but in this course, you'll learn about other equally extraordinary people from antiquity whose stories are much less familiar. These unsung heroes include generals and queens, inventors and engineers, athletes and philosophers, and businesspeople and slaves. You'll also get to know a few antiheroes, such as bandits and con men. In all cases, these men and women were underappreciated overachievers who shaped their times—and often the course of history itself—in surprising and profound ways. The first one you'll meet is Cimon of Athens.



## Cimon the Strategus

Cimon was born in Athens around 510 BC into a prominent aristocratic family. Also named Cimon, his grandfather won the chariot race at the Olympic Games three times in a row. His family reached even greater heights with his father, Miltiades, who was a strategus—or general—in Athens. In the 490s, Darius I, the Persian king of kings, dispatched a large military expedition to squash Athens because the Athenians had sent a few ships to aid a city being attacked by the Persians. Against all odds, Athens and its allies, led by Miltiades, defeated the invaders at the Battle of Marathon in 490 BC.

Miltiades's victory at Marathon brought him great glory but also provoked the envy of his political rivals. When he headed a disastrous expedition the following year, these adversaries manipulated public opinion and brought charges of treason against him. He was found guilty and fined 50 talents. Unable to pay this colossal sum, he was cast into prison, where he died due to a gangrenous leg wound. By Athenian law, Miltiades' debt was inherited by his son. Cimon was able to repay the debt and thus retain the privileges of citizenship and the ability to pursue a political career—allegedly by marrying off his sister to a wealthy Athenian.

Although prone to indulgence in wine as a youth, Cimon had a noble character. The ancient biographer Plutarch describes him as “just as brave as Miltiades, as intelligent as Themistocles ... and more honorable than either one.” Throughout his life, Cimon displayed an admiration for Sparta, a state whose citizens were renowned for their bravery, austerity, and martial ability. Sparta had an oligarchic form of government, and Cimon tended to favor the oligarchic party at Athens.

In 480 BC, the Persians launched an even larger invasion led by the new king of kings, Xerxes I, seeking revenge for their humiliating defeat at Marathon. A coalition of cities, including Athens and Sparta, opposed the Persians. The Persians defeated the heroic Spartans at the Battle of Thermopylae and then captured Athens and burned it to the ground. However, Greek resistance continued, and the allies managed to win decisive victories at Salamis and Plataea. Cimon, approaching the age of 30 then, distinguished himself during the war and began his rise in Athenian politics.

The Greeks realized that the key to success in the war lay in joining together against their common foe. Consequently, in 478 BC, most of the Greek city-states united in a mutual defense alliance known as the Delian League. The league's first operation was to capture Eion, a strategically located Persian stronghold in Thrace. In 476 BC, as an elected strategist, Cimon led the assault, won two significant battles, and conquered Eion. The Athenians commemorated the event with a victory monument set up in the heart of Athens. Although etiquette forbade specifically naming Cimon in the inscriptions, the monument was generally interpreted as an honor directed at him, further enhancing his reputation.

## Cimon's Exploits and His Rivals' Envy

Next, Cimon captured the island of Scyros, which was a lair for pirates. By settling Scyros, Athenian colonists were able to control the middle of the Aegean Sea. Cimon scored an even greater coup by discovering the bones of Theseus—the greatest of all Athenian mythological figures—on Scyros and bringing them back to Athens. Nevertheless, Cimon's greatest triumph was the Battle of the Eurymedon. Although the Greeks were outnumbered, his skilled generalship secured an overwhelming victory against the Persians, effectively ending Persian attempts to invade Greece and freeing the Greeks from the constant fear of attack.

Over the next few years, Cimon continued to serve as a general and reached the pinnacle of his fame and power. He also adeptly courted the Athenian public with magnanimous gestures and material handouts. Many of these actions seemed to be directed at the poorer citizens of Athens. He removed the fences surrounding his estates so that the people might freely partake of the fruits he grew, and he offered them a free meal at his house every day. When he strolled around Athens, his companions were ready to exchange their clothes with any elderly or ill-clad citizen they might encounter or press a few coins into the hands of impoverished people. In addition, he built public works for the citizens' use and enjoyment.

However, Cimon's exploits only sharpened his rivals' hatred of him, and even some of the common people of Athens began turning against him. One thing that especially grated on them was his unabashed admiration



for Sparta. In 463 BC, these resentments prompted his competitors to bring charges of corruption against him. One of the leaders of the prosecution was a 30-year-old aspiring politician named Pericles, whose father was responsible for the trial and condemnation of Cimon's father. Because the charges against Cimon were almost certainly unfounded, he was either acquitted or escaped with only a modest fine.

Furthermore, tensions were growing between Athenians who favored a more traditional form of oligarchic rule centered around a council of aristocratic officials—called the Areopagus—and those who advocated for more democratic institutions giving greater power to the people. Cimon was a staunch defender of the Areopagus and oligarchic rule, and this stance gradually eroded his image among the prodemocratic factions of the common people.

## The Ostracism of Cimon

The chain of events that precipitated Cimon's fall began in 464 BC when a catastrophic earthquake struck Sparta. It killed 20,000 Spartans and was so violent that it demolished all but five houses in Sparta. The Spartan economy was based on an underclass called helots, composed of conquered neighboring peoples whom the Spartans systematically terrorized



Cimon

and maintained in a slave-like state. Taking advantage of the earthquake, the helots rebelled and established a stronghold on the slopes of Mount Ithome. Confronted with this crisis, Sparta asked its allies from the Persian Wars to help suppress the insurrection.

When Sparta's request was brought before the Athenian assembly, a debate ensued. Cimon still held great sway over the Athenian people, and so they voted to help their long-time ally. Along with 4,000 Athenian hoplite soldiers, Cimon went to Sparta's aid. However, as the Athenians drew near the scene of the revolt, the Spartans began to worry about having so many foreign soldiers roaming around their home territory. They also feared that the democratically inclined Athenians might sympathize with the rebel slaves. Abruptly, the Spartans changed their minds and demanded that the Athenians immediately return home.

This rude dismissal greatly offended the Athenians and turned public opinion against Sparta. As Sparta's most vocal advocate, Cimon found himself the target of hostility as well. Taking advantage of the general anti-aristocratic feeling, the prodemocratic leaders of Athens pushed for political reforms to strip the Areopagus of its powers and pave the way for radical democracy. Cimon staunchly resisted these efforts, which only caused his popularity to plummet further. Then, he was ostracized—meaning that he was expelled from Athens for 10 years. He was allowed to return from exile in 451 BC but could not regain his former level of prestige, as Pericles was now firmly in charge.

Nevertheless, he was entrusted with commanding several military expeditions against Persia and achieved further military successes. In 449 BC, he died in a campaign on the island of Cyprus. The sources disagree as to whether the cause was a battle injury or an illness. Due to the fear that news of his death would discourage his troops, it was hidden from them for more than a month until after the battle had been won. Thus, Cimon continued to earn victories for his country even posthumously.

## Cimon's Legacy

Despite the central role that Cimon played in the monumental events of the 5th century BC, he is often overlooked. His major achievements in definitively ending the threat of Persian attacks have been overshadowed by the flashy victories that took place during the initial invasions. His vital actions in establishing the foundations of the Athenian Empire have also been insufficiently appreciated due to Pericles finishing the job and retroactively claiming all the credit.

Additionally, Cimon's pro-Spartan inclinations, which prompted the Athenians' involvement in the helot revolt, had two colossal—if inadvertent—effects on subsequent history. This chain of events sparked the hostility between Athens and Sparta, eventually leading to the Greek states' mutual self-destruction in the Peloponnesian War and resulting in Athens creating a democratic form of government that would serve as an inspiration for all later democracies.

In the broader history of politics, Cimon also deserves credit as an early master of political propaganda. His Eion victory monument, recovery of Theseus's bones, public works projects, and wooing of the people through lavish gifts are all examples of propaganda aimed at enhancing his reputation. Although not as much of a household name as other Athenian leaders of the time, he deserves equal recognition. To quote his ancient biographer, Plutarch, Cimon was “a man who was second to none in Athens in birth or in wealth, who won the most brilliant victories over the Persians, and who filled the entire city with money and loot.”

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# 2



## Polycrates of Samos: The Tale of a Tyrant

**T**he democratic city-states of ancient Greece were highly influential and produced astonishing artistic and political triumphs. They also tended to be indecisive, unstable, fickle, and inefficient. In reality, nearly every Greek city-state, including Athens, went through a phase of political development when they were ruled by tyrants from the 8th to 6th centuries BC. While the modern English word *tyrant* carries connotations of a wicked or oppressive ruler, the Greek word from which it is derived, *tyrannos*, originally had a more value-neutral meaning and might best be translated as “strongman” or “chieftain.” This lecture is about one such tyrant: Polycrates of Samos.



## Tyrant or Pirate?

Samos is a large island off the coast of Asia Minor, separated from modern Turkey by a narrow one-mile strait. This location gave it a strategically significant position on the border between the Greek world and the vast Persian Empire. Polycrates lived on Samos during the 6th century BC and grew up in a wealthy household. His father held a lucrative government post managing naval resources and affairs. Polycrates benefited from a good education, and he showed a particular enthusiasm for music and poetry.

The traditional date for when Polycrates became the tyrant of Samos is 533 BC, although some scholars argue that it was as early as 550 BC. During a period of civil strife, he and his brothers, Syloson and Pantagnotus, decided to seize control of Samos. They took advantage of a festival for the goddess Hera and murdered the leading men of the city in the middle of a religious ritual. The brothers had planned to divide Samos into three parts, with each one ruling a section. However, after the coup, Polycrates murdered Pantagnotus and forced Syloson to flee into exile, thereby gaining sole power for himself.

Recognizing Samos's dominant location on the Aegean Sea and the rich trade that passed through it, Polycrates began building up the Samian navy until it reached at least 100 penteconters—speedy warships propelled by 25 rowers on each side. He also raised and trained a force of 1,000 archers to shower enemy vessels with arrows. He is credited with designing a new type of ship known as the *Samaina*. Scholars argue about the ship's exact nature, but it seemed to be a hybrid vessel that could be used as a warship or a merchant ship—useful for a ruler intent on flexing his maritime power.

Polycrates's fleet raided and plundered across the Aegean and brought back booty and slaves that enriched Samos. The line between official military actions and piracy was not clear-cut at this time, and much of this activity probably resembled the latter more than the former. Polycrates's most dangerous potential foe was the Persian Empire, so to shore up Samos's position, he fostered a friendship with Amasis, the king of Egypt. However, in the end, Polycrates abandoned Amasis and even contributed 40 warships to assist Persia in its campaign of conquest.

## Three Great Engineering Feats

Samos enjoyed a period of economic prosperity due to the steady stream of loot from Polycrates's raiding expeditions and the island's role as a maritime power and center of Mediterranean trade. According to the ancient writer Athenaeus, Polycrates lured skilled craftsmen to Samos by paying them higher wages and patronized them personally by commissioning various luxury goods. He was also responsible for importing a veritable menagerie of desirable animal breeds, including hounds, goats, and cows. Another exotic beast, the lion, prominently featured on Samian coins dating to Polycrates's reign, and numerous lion statues have been found on Samos. Scholars theorize that the lion may have been associated with Hera, whose sanctuary was the most important religious site on the island.

The most lasting of Polycrates's accomplishments was a series of high-profile engineering projects. One was the reconstruction of Samos's harbor, the centerpiece of which was an enormous mole or breakwater to protect the anchorage from storms. The ancient Greek historian Herodotus describes it as being 120 feet deep and 1,200 feet long, and the mole visible in the harbor today still contains 2,500-year-old sections of the ancient structure. The second project was the construction of a huge temple dedicated to Hera. It was a gargantuan structure more than 320 feet long and 180 feet wide. Herodotus refers to it as the largest temple in the Greek world at the time, and it strongly influenced subsequent architecture.

The third and most impressive was a tunnel bored for 3,400 feet through solid stone. Samos's capital city had outgrown local freshwater sources, and the best spring was located on the other side of a 900-foot-high mountain. The purpose of the tunnel was to contain an aqueduct bringing water from this spring through the mountain and into the city. This daring project was planned and overseen by an engineer named Eupalinos of Megara, and the tunnel became known as the Tunnel of Eupalinos.

Drilling through rock with the crude tools available at the time was difficult, so to speed things up, two crews drilled simultaneously from opposite sides of the mountain. Therefore, Eupalinos had to ensure that the two tunnels would meet at the midway point under the mountain. In the end, the two tunnels did join up and were less than 2 feet out of alignment—an incredible

engineering achievement. The entire length of the aqueduct was enclosed and protected, and it was so well concealed that archaeologists did not find it until the 19th century. Its full length was not explored until the 1970s.



Nonetheless, the exact dates of these projects are uncertain, and scholars debate whether they were built during Polycrates's reign. For instance, the Temple of Hera was a longstanding endeavor that was advanced or completed under him rather than initiated by him. One of the most intact statue groups found at the site, the Geneleos Group, dates to at least a couple of decades prior to his reign.

## Polycrates's Downfall

Toward the end of his reign, Polycrates ran short on cash, perhaps due to overspending on construction projects and the loss of the lucrative trade with Egypt when his relationship with Amasis ended. His need for an infusion of cash eventually brought about a disastrous end. The agent of his downfall

was Oroites, the governor of a neighboring province of the Persian Empire. In 522 BC, Oroites sent a message to Polycrates claiming that the Persian king, Cambyses, was planning to have Oroites killed, thus giving Oroites an incentive to assist Polycrates. Oroites said that he would provide Polycrates with a large sum to oppose Cambyses.

Polycrates sent his secretary Maiandrios to investigate this offer. In preparation for his arrival, Oroites filled eight large chests with rocks and covered the rocks with a thin layer of gold. He showed the treasure to Maiandrios, who apparently neglected to look beneath the top layer and so reported to Polycrates that the proposal was legitimate. Then, Polycrates agreed to meet Oroites in the city of Magnesia to take possession of the treasure. Friends, family, and oracles all cautioned against accepting the too-good-to-be-true offer, and his daughter had a dream in which she saw him suspended in the air, being bathed by Zeus and anointed by Helios, the sun god. Believing it to be a bad omen, she begged him not to go to Magnesia, but he disregarded her counsel as well.

Upon arriving in Magnesia, Polycrates was promptly murdered by Oroites. How he was slain remains a mystery, with Herodotus stating that “Oroites killed him in a way too disgusting to relate.” His corpse was hung from a stake, and “as Polycrates hung suspended, he completely fulfilled his daughter’s vision, for he was bathed by Zeus when it rained, and anointed by Helios the Sun as he released the moisture from his body.”

## **The Return of Sylosos**

The man who took over as ruler of Samos was none other than Maiandrios. His elevation—likely with Oroites’s backing—suggests that the two colluded to lure Polycrates to his death. However, Oroites’s triumph was short-lived because the next year, he offended the new king of Persia, Darius I, who arranged to have Oroites assassinated by his own bodyguards. Understandably, Darius did not trust Maiandrios as the ruler of Samos and so decided to depose him and install his candidate: Syloson, the brother Polycrates had exiled decades earlier.



After being exiled from Samos, Syloson went to Egypt and was there when Cambyses invaded. At the time, Darius was a bodyguard in Cambyses's retinue. Syloson had a red cloak that he liked to wear, and while in the marketplace, he encountered Darius, who took a liking to the cloak and offered to buy it. Moved by some impulse, Syloson replied, "I would not sell this cloak at any price, but if you must have it, I will give it to you as a gift." Years later, when Darius became king of Persia, Syloson went to his palace and reminded him of the gift. He asked Darius to restore him as Samos's ruler—a request the king was happy to grant, as it coincided with his wishes to place a new ruler there.

The story of Polycrates contains many elements typical of tyrants, including seizing power by force, being a skilled and clever military leader, building impressive public works, and ultimately coming to a violent end. Polycrates was a patron of the arts who demonstrated a desire to improve the lives of his citizens, but he also displayed excessive cruelty and brutality. Other tyrants had even worse reputations for savagery and arbitrariness, and by the end of the Greek era, the word *tyrannos* had acquired all the negative connotations that it carries in English today.

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# 3



## Epaminondas of Thebes: Slayer of Spartans

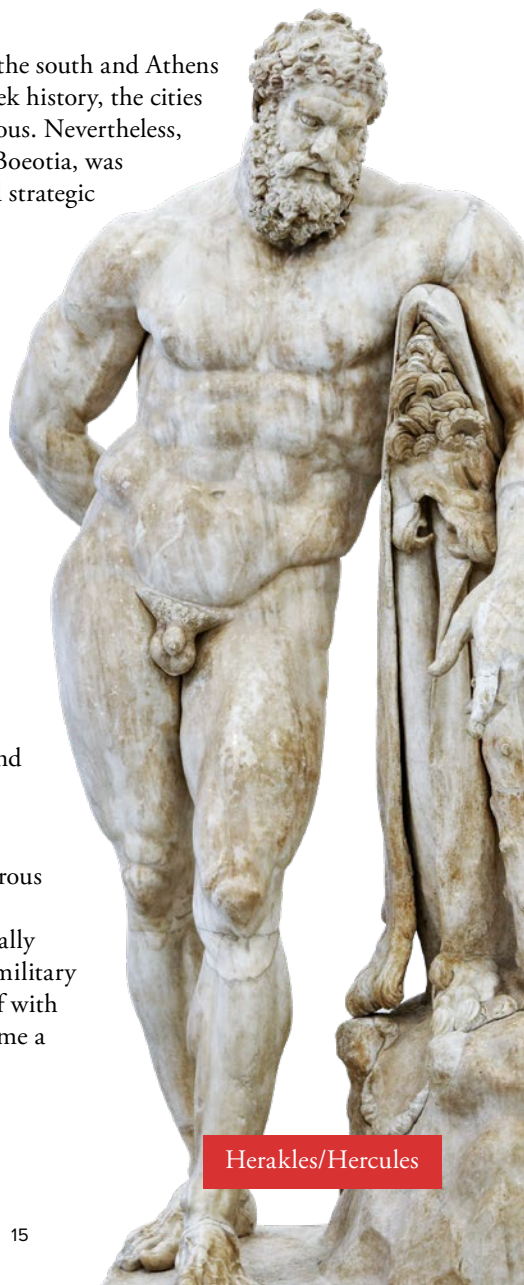
**I**n all of world history, not many individuals can say that they liberated multiple countries from hundreds of years of oppression and servitude. One relatively recent example was Simón Bolívar, who freed much of South America from occupation and rule by colonial European powers in the 19th century. In the 4th century BC, the ancient Greek city of Thebes produced another great liberator. His name was Epaminondas, and he not only delivered the cities of southern Greece from centuries of Spartan enslavement and domination but also destroyed the once-mighty Spartan state's power forever by repeatedly defeating its supposedly invincible warriors in open battle.

## The Rise of Thebes

While the flashy doings of Sparta in the south and Athens on the coast dominated much of Greek history, the cities of central Greece were more anonymous. Nevertheless, central Greece, a territory known as Boeotia, was important due to its fertile plains and strategic location.

The oldest and largest of the Boetian cities was Thebes, which featured prominently in many of the most famous Greek myths. For example, it was the hometown of the hero Herakles—better known as Hercules. It was also the setting for the story of Oedipus, who saved Thebes from the depredations of the Sphinx and gained infamy for unknowingly killing his father and marrying his mother. In the 4th century BC, Thebes rose to power and had its moment in the sun under the leadership of Epaminondas—briefly eclipsing Sparta and Athens and dramatically changing the course of Greek history.

Epaminondas was born into a prosperous family and enjoyed an unusually complete education. Although culturally knowledgeable, his true passion was military training, to which he devoted himself with a single-minded dedication that became a hallmark of his personality.



Herakles/Hercules

Epaminondas's one overriding obsession was to render Thebes safe from Spartan aggression. This monomania consumed him so much that he never married or had children, and he directed all his efforts toward this single goal. The first phase of his life coincided with the era of maximum Spartan domination over Greece. He was probably born sometime between 410 and 405 BC during the closing phases of the Peloponnesian War, which ended in 404 BC. During the war, Thebes had largely been an ally of Sparta, but once Athens was defeated, the Spartans sought to diminish Theban power and influence in central Greece.

As Epaminondas grew to adulthood over the next 3 decades, Sparta controlled a large domain that extended beyond its traditional stronghold of southern Greece. In 382 BC, when a Spartan army was passing through Theban territory on its way to punish another uppity state, the commander decided to take advantage of his proximity to Thebes and seize the Cadmeia. Named for Cadmus—the legendary founder of Thebes—the Cadmeia was a fortress for the city and the site of many sacred buildings and monuments. Moreover, the Spartan commander removed the legitimate Theban government and installed Spartan puppets in its place.

However, Sparta's control of Thebes was short-lived. In December of 379 BC, a group of Theban exiles returned to the city and assassinated the pro-Spartan heads of the government. Within the city, Epaminondas organized a resistance among his fellow citizens and, together with the exiles, expelled the Spartan garrison from the Cadmeia and freed their state from Spartan control. The emboldened Thebans then united the other cities of Boeotia under their leadership and formed a league to oppose Sparta. In 375 BC, the Thebans won a limited victory at the Battle of Tegyra, which gave them hope that they could stand up to the Spartans.

## The War against Sparta

When a large Spartan army invaded Boeotia in 371 BC, the Thebans and their allies mustered to meet them near the town of Leuctra. Epaminondas was placed in command of the Boeotians, and he devised an unusual strategy. Greek battles of this era were fought between groups of heavily armed foot soldiers—known as hoplites—arranged into a phalanx consisting of about



10 rows of tightly packed hoplites whose shields overlapped to form a solid wall bristling with spearpoints. Marching in step, the opposing phalanxes would smack together, and whichever side could shove their way forward and break their opponents' formation would win.

The standard practice was to station the best, most disciplined troops on the right side of the line. At the Battle of Leuctra, the Spartan commander arrayed his forces in this way, with the elite full-citizen Spartiates on the right, and allies and lesser troops occupying the center and the left. However, Epaminondas broke with convention by putting his best troops—the Thebans—on the left side of his line so that they directly faced the Spartiates, with the rest of the Boeotians filling out the center and right.

Epaminondas made a second innovative decision when he arranged his troops for the battle. He ordered the Thebans on the left side of the allied formation, who would have to confront the Spartans head-on, to arrange themselves into a phalanx that was an unprecedented 50 rows deep instead of the usual 10 or so rows. To spearhead this revolutionary ultra-deep phalanx, he assigned his best troops to the first couple of rows. The men placed in this key position were a famous unit of the Theban army known as the Sacred Band, which was composed of 300 hand-picked hoplites.

The battle unfolded as Epaminondas envisioned. Positioned slightly ahead of the other sections, the Theban phalanx crashed against the right side of the Spartan line, which contained the Spartiates and the Spartan king, Cleombrotus. Epaminondas was a hands-on general and stationed himself in the heart of the Theban phalanx. The Spartan line wavered and broke, and the Thebans surged forward. When Cleombrotus was slain, the remaining Spartans were cut down, and their allies turned and fled. Thus, the Battle of Leuctra was a devastating defeat for Sparta. Not only was the city-state's power severely crippled by the loss of many of its warriors, but its intimidating aura of martial invincibility was permanently shattered.

Not content with thwarting Sparta's invasion, hamstringing its ability to wage war, and demolishing its reputation, Epaminondas carried the war to the Spartans and invaded their homeland. He persuaded the Thebans and their allies to grant him command of a gigantic army of around 60,000 men and advance into southern Greece. The remaining Spartans dared not face

him and fortified themselves behind the walls of their city. Epaminondas and his army ravaged the countryside, burning farms and capturing the smaller towns.

Next, he turned west and marched into the neighboring territory of Messenia—which had endured hundreds of years of slavery and terror at the hands of Sparta—and liberated it. He also encouraged the cities in the region of Arcadia, located to the north of Sparta, to free themselves once and for all from Spartan domination. They eagerly responded to his call, formed a mutual defense alliance called the Arcadian League, and built a new joint capital city named Megalopolis—literally, “Big City.”

Collectively, Epaminondas’s actions in Boeotia and southern Greece set free dozens of city-states and as many as half a million people, making him one of history’s most important liberators. Even more than the Battle of Leuctra, this great emancipation broke Sparta’s power because it deprived Sparta of the oppressed labor force upon which it depended.

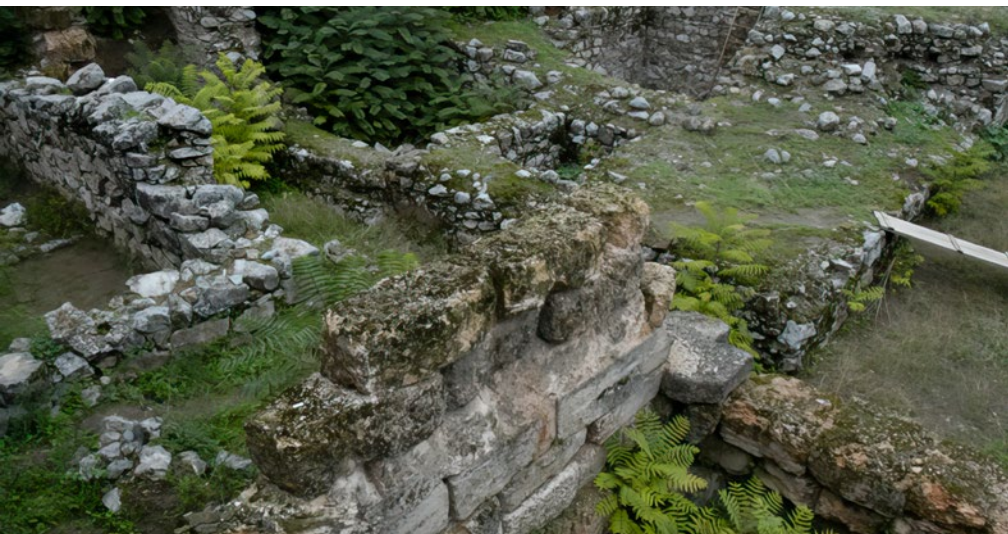
## Treason and Jealousy

Epaminondas and his triumphant army returned home to Thebes in 369 BC, but his welcome was not what he expected. Some men who were jealous of his success immediately put him on trial for treason. The basis for the charges was that while completing the campaign, he had remained in command for 4 months longer than his appointed term. At the trial, he simply stated that his actions spoke louder than any words and that he would happily agree to be executed on the condition that the Thebans carved their accusations on his tombstone along with the following lines:

Epaminondas compelled the Thebans against their will to lay waste to the region of Laconia which no foe had harmed for 500 years. He refounded Messene after 330 years of subjugation by the Spartans. He made allies of the Arcadians, and united them into a League. He restored freedom to the Greeks.

Shamed by this statement, his accusers dropped the charges.

The rest of the decade was the period of Theban hegemony under Epaminondas's leadership, during which Thebes became the leading state of Greece. However, success bred envy, and a number of city-states began to align themselves against Thebes. Although Epaminondas was a gifted and inspirational general, he was less skilled at diplomacy and politics, and Thebes was unable to forge an effective and long-lasting empire. In 362 BC, a gigantic battle was fought at Mantinea, which saw Thebes and its allies pitted against an unlikely coalition of Sparta, Athens, and Mantinea—former mutual enemies.



Just as he had at Leuctra, Epaminondas based his strategy around a direct attack by the Thebans against the enemies' best troops—the Spartans. Once again, the Thebans managed to fracture the Spartan phalanx, with Epaminondas personally taking part. However, his bravery proved his undoing when a Spartan stabbed him in the chest with a spear. The point broke off in the wound, and the injured Epaminondas was carried from the field. Nonetheless, he insisted on observing the end of the battle, and once it became clear that the Thebans would emerge victorious, he pulled out the spearpoint and died.

Without Epaminondas's leadership, Thebes quickly lost its role as the hegemon of Greece and went back to being merely one of many Greek city-states. Bereft of its economic base and with most of its warriors dead, Sparta never recovered and instead slipped into obscurity and irrelevance. The Messenians and Arcadians retained their long-desired freedom—at least until the Macedonians stormed down from the north and conquered all of Greece. At the Battle of Chaeronea in 338 BC, at which the invaders defeated the combined forces of the Greeks, the entire Sacred Band of Thebes was slain.

Nearly 500 years after Epaminondas's death, the Roman-era author Pausanias notes that tourists at Thebes could still view a statue of Epaminondas that bore an inscription praising his achievements:

Through my contrivances was Sparta stripped of her glory.  
And holy Messene at last welcomed back her children.  
Through the armed valor of Thebes was Megalopolis encircled  
with walls. And all of Greece gained independence and  
freedom.

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# 4



## Ctesibius and Hero: Alexandrian Inventors

**I**n the 3rd century BC, Alexandria was one of the great cities of the Mediterranean. Founded by Alexander the Great, it was a center for commerce and learning in the Greek-speaking world. Among its treasures was the Library of Alexandria, a repository of the world's knowledge. Many of the greatest minds of the era went to Alexandria to work among its collections, but in this lecture, you'll learn about two homegrown inventors: Ctesibius and Hero. Their technological innovations could have changed the course of history by sparking the Industrial Revolution sooner, but the potential of their inventions was often squandered on performing the equivalent of ancient magic tricks.

## From Pulley to Organ

Ctesibius was born in Alexandria, probably around the time of the library's establishment. One ancient source informs that "he was unusual for his ingenuity and great industriousness, and was known to be especially infatuated with mechanical contrivances." One of Ctesibius's first inventions was inspired by his father's barber shop, and it yielded a central insight into physics that became the cornerstone of many of his later inventions.

The shop was equipped with a mirror, but constantly adjusting it for patrons of differing heights was inconvenient and cumbersome. Ctesibius devised a contraption with a hanging mirror balanced by a counterweight that allowed it to be effortlessly shifted to any height. He did this by using two pulleys and a metal weight of equal mass to the mirror, which was hung from a cord within a tube. As the mirror was adjusted up and down, the counterweight in the tube also moved up and down in perfect equilibrium.

The end of the tube with the counterweight was either tapered or pinched off, leaving a narrow opening. When the weight descended, pressure built up in the tube and produced a whistling sound as air was forcefully expelled through the small aperture. From this happy accident, Ctesibius's creative mind deduced one of the foundational principles of pneumatics: Compressed air generates force. Additionally, he realized that air forced through different-sized openings could produce musical tones—a principle he would later exploit to build the world's first known pipe organ.

This organ was a complicated instrument built around two cylinders containing pistons, which were operated by levers that could be pumped up and down. When the levers were pumped, air was forced by the pistons into a funnel-shaped central reservoir suspended within a water tank. As more air was forced in, water was pushed out of the reservoir and up into the surrounding cistern. That raised water kept the air in the reservoir under constant pressure and pushed the air up through another tube connected to the top of the reservoir, which in turn ran beneath the pipes of the organ and was connected to them by sliding valves. These valves were opened or closed by the organist pressing the keys of a keyboard.

Often referred to as a water organ, this instrument became popular during the Hellenistic and Roman eras. The ancient writer Athenaeus notes that Ctesibius taught his wife to play his invention, and she became an accomplished organist—possibly starting a trend in which organists in antiquity were often women. While the overwhelming majority of musicians depicted in ancient art are men, quite a few of the individuals shown playing water organs are female, such as on mosaics from Syria and North Africa and a terracotta statue from Alexandria.

## Ctesibius's Other Inventions

At the heart of the water organ were the cylinders with pistons that produced the air pressure—in other words, a pump. Ctesibius devised a variety of pumps to move water and elevate it from one level to another. He also invented the earliest example of a fire pump. Such fire pumps were used in antiquity by firefighting brigades, most notably by the unit of 7,000 professional firemen called the *vigiles*, established by the first Roman emperor, Augustus. Thus, in a sense, Ctesibius can be considered the father of the fire truck.

Another important innovation was his improved version of the water clock. He used his knowledge of pneumatic pressure to devise a system of containers that accurately measured intermediate time intervals. His clock also featured toothed gears that rotated at a fixed rate, making it easy to measure units of time. He even incorporated some technology from his organ to trigger the blowing of trumpets at set times. Therefore, all later cuckoo clocks, grandfather clocks, and alarm clocks owe something to Ctesibius.

In the realm of warfare, Ctesibius invented several types of catapults, one of which employed metal springs to store tension to propel a missile. Another design used compressed air cylinders to provide the propulsive force. However, while the principle behind the pneumatic catapult was sound, producing cylinders capable of holding sufficient air pressure to make it a useful weapon was beyond the capabilities of blacksmiths and metalworkers in the 3rd century BC.

Ctesibius wrote several books, including one on pneumatics and the *Memorabilia*, a summary of his inventions and the physical principles behind them. Unfortunately, none survives intact today, but later inventors and scientists of antiquity read and copied from them, so they were very influential. Despite his genius and the utility of his inventions, his achievements did not earn him much monetary reward. The exact date of his death is unknown, but it probably occurred around 230 BC.

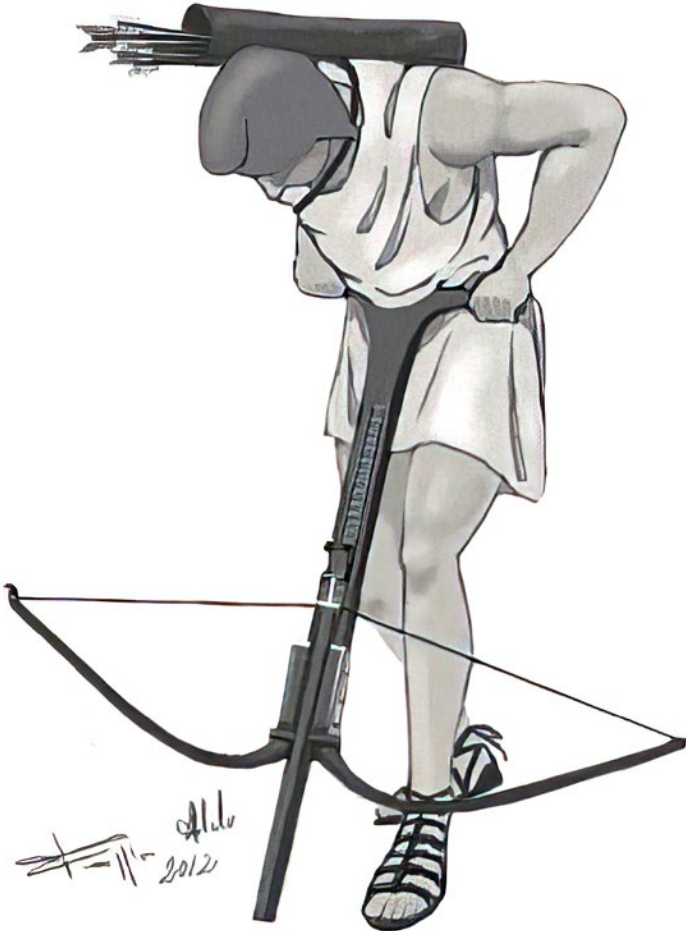
## Mathematics and Magic

Several centuries later, Alexandria was home to another creative inventor named Hero. Unlike Ctesibius, around a dozen of Hero's writings have survived in whole or in part. From these works, scholars guess that he was active in the middle of the 1st century AD as a teacher at the Library of Alexandria. Among the topics he wrote about were pneumatics, optics, hydraulics, mechanics, measurement, geometry, and mathematics. Later writers often refer to him by the nickname *Mechanikos*—literally, “the machine man” or “the mechanic.”

Like Ctesibius, Hero designed elaborate organs and clocks. His organ's pumps were powered by a windmill whose rotation could be harnessed by cams on a wheel shaft to drive a piston up and down. While the design may not have worked well in practice, it was the first attested instance of the wind being harnessed to power a machine. Indeed, Hero was an expert at employing all manner of mechanical devices to apply force and move objects, such as winches, pulleys, levers, wedges, and screws. He also discussed other physical principles and forces, including the center of gravity, toothed gears, and pressure valves.

In the realm of pure mathematics, Ctesibius's most famous contribution was a formula for calculating the area of a triangle based on the lengths of its sides. In a more practical vein, he specified a set of instruments for surveying land and the techniques for employing them. One of his inventions whose descendants are ubiquitous today was the odometer. In Hero's case, it consisted of a device attached to a chariot or wagon wheel to measure how far the vehicle had been driven based on the wheel's rotations.

Hero also dabbled in war machines. One of his more promising efforts was an extra-powerful type of crossbow called the *gastraphetes*—the “belly shooter.” The name refers to the way the archer braced the device with one end against the ground and the other end pressed to his belly. Thus, he could use his entire body weight plus the strength of his arms and legs to draw back the bow.





A particular specialty of Hero's was crafting clever machines that performed what are categorized today as magic tricks or stunts. For example, he created a "magic" wine bowl that would refill itself when emptied. Along the same lines, he fashioned a drinking horn that looked like it was filled with one liquid, but when someone poured from it, they discovered that it dispensed two different liquids simultaneously.

Many of his magic machines were designed for use at temples, where they awed gullible worshippers with the power of the gods. One such temple contraption consisted of an altar flanked by bronze human figures holding libation bowls. These statues were accompanied by a bronze snake. When the priests or worshippers lit a fire on the altar, expanding hot air within a hidden cavity forced the liquid stored inside the figures to be dispensed into the bowls. As a bonus effect, the generated steam also made the bronze snake hiss dramatically.

Another of his many contrivances for temples was a device that amounted to the world's first vending machine. Worshippers dropped coins into a slot at the top of the machine, and then the coins fell onto a hinged plate, which pressed on a lever attached to a valve. When the valve opened, holy water flowed out of a spigot. The plate tilted until the coins slid off, causing the valve to close again and cutting off the stream of liquid.

## Hero's Steam Engine

Of all of Hero's inventions, the most tantalizing one utilized steam power. It consisted of a metal ball pierced on opposite sides by small, L-shaped, open-ended tubes. This ball was suspended on a pivot so that it could rotate above an enclosed cauldron of water. When a fire was lit beneath the cauldron, the water inside turned into pressurized steam, which flowed through a pipe at the top of the cauldron and into the ball. The steam in the ball burst out of the two little tubes, creating thrust and causing the ball to spin rapidly.

This steam-driven gadget was viewed as nothing more than a toy or a magic trick at the time. Nevertheless, it used the same principles that underlie the steam engine, which powered the Industrial Revolution—an event that

transformed the entire world in the 19th century. Strictly speaking, Hero's spinning ball was not a true steam engine, but it could have been combined with several of his other inventions and machines, such as pistons, to form a steam turbine.

Some scholars argue that the state of metallurgy available in Hero's time would have prevented the creation of a rudimentary steam engine analogous to the later steam engines that drove the factories and trains of the Industrial Revolution. While this may be true, if Hero or his followers had continued tinkering with this technology for another century or so rather than abandoning it as an amusing dead end, who knows what they might have achieved or how they might have changed the course of history?

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# 5



## Olympians: Ancient Athletic Champions

**T**he first Olympic Games were held at the sanctuary of Olympia in 776 BC. The stade—a sprint of approximately 200 meters—was the only event then. From these humble beginnings, the competition grew into a massive cultural phenomenon attended by tens of thousands of athletes and spectators. Over time, the Olympic Games were joined by three other great Panhellenic athletic contests—the Pythian, Isthmian, and Nemean Games—all staggered on a 4-year cycle. Like today, the most successful athletes became celebrities with their names recorded in ancient histories and their images preserved in statues and on pottery. This lecture introduces several sports heroes who captured the public imagination for their athletic prowess and illustrates a core aspect of ancient Greek culture.

## Milo the Wrestler

Combat sports were always popular in the ancient world, and the oldest of these was likely wrestling. The most renowned wrestler of antiquity was Milo of Croton, who lived in the 6th century BC. Located at the southernmost tip of Italy, Croton had the reputation of producing exceptional athletes. Before Milo's time, Croton already boasted seven hometown Olympic victors. At one Olympic Games, the top seven finishers in the stade were from this city.

Milo's unusually long athletic career began in his teens and continued well into his forties. He won his first wrestling victory competing in the boys' division at the Olympic Games of 540 BC. From 536 to 520 BC, he took the Olympic crowns in wrestling every time. He was equally successful in the other three great Panhellenic athletic tournaments—winning ten times at the Isthmian, nine times at the Nemean, and seven times at the Pythian Games.

Milo acquired legendary status, and various ancient authors relate stories about his alleged feats of strength and skill. While some are almost certainly exaggerated, they are probably based on actual incidents. For example, some sources claim that he saved the life of the philosopher Pythagoras by holding up the roof of a collapsing building long enough for Pythagoras and his disciples to escape. And not only was Milo a star athlete—he was also a war hero. He served as an officer in Croton's army and gained renown during a war with the neighboring rival city of Sybaris. To encourage his soldiers, he led them into battle wearing his Olympic victory crowns. Furthermore, Milo was notorious for his ability to consume massive quantities of food.

In 516 BC, Milo entered his seventh Olympiad despite being in his forties and walked away without achieving victory for the first time. Nevertheless, his many triumphs ensured that he was ranked as one of the greatest Olympians of all time. A statue of Milo was made, which bore an epigram composed by the famous poet Simonides: "This is the noble statue of noble Milo, who by the banks of Pisa, was victorious seven times and never once was driven to his knees." In yet another impressive feat of strength, Milo supposedly single-handedly carried his own statue to Olympia, where it was erected.

Milo's fondness for showing off ultimately led to his death in a bizarre manner. While traveling through a forest, he encountered a farmer who was splitting a tree by inserting wedges into the wood, gradually prying it apart.

Milo could not resist exhibiting his strength, and he put his hands into the crack and attempted to wrench the tree apart by brute force. However, the wedges fell out, and the crack snapped shut, trapping his hands. While he was stuck in this vulnerable position, a pack of wolves came by and devoured him.

## Theagenes the Professional Athlete

Along with wrestling, the other two ancient combat sports were boxing and pankration. Ancient boxing matches were savage affairs with no time limit; the bout simply continued until one fighter was beaten into submission. Meanwhile, the pankration was a brutal sport that can best be described as an ancient version of today's ultimate fighting, in which the combatants could kick, punch, and wrestle. Therefore, boxers and pankratiasts had to be tough, and one of the toughest was another Theagenes of Thasos, who lived during the 5th century BC.





Theagenes amassed 24 titles in boxing and pankration at all four great Panhellenic games. Besides combat sports, he also competed and won at running events. As an early example of a professional athlete who devoted himself to training and competing full time, he spent decades constantly traveling and participating in minor events in addition to the four great quadrennial sporting events, winning more than 1,300 contests. An inscription records that he was undefeated as a boxer for 22 years—an impressively long professional athletic career in any era.

However, Theagenes's success made him some enemies. After his death, a bronze statue in his likeness was erected in Thasos. Every night, a man who had hated Theagenes while he was alive came and flogged the statue with a whip. One night, while he was whipping the statue, it toppled over onto him and killed him. The man's sons then brought a lawsuit against the statue, prosecuting it for murder. The statue was found guilty and sentenced to exile, and this was accomplished by throwing it into the sea.

Later, when the crops failed to grow, the people of Thasos consulted the Delphic oracle, which proclaimed that they had to bring home all of the city's exiles to end the drought. The exiles were allowed to return, but the drought continued. The Thasians sent another delegation to the oracle demanding to know why the drought persisted. The oracle replied, "But you forgot about great Theagenes." Fortunately, some fishermen had snagged the statue in their nets, and it was set up again in the city and chained securely to its base. From then on, Theagenes's statue was said to possess a miraculous ability to cure diseases, and it became the focus of a local religious cult.

## The Diagorid Dynasty

During the 5th century BC, the family of Diagoras of Rhodes produced six Olympic victors over 3 generations. The dynasty began with Diagoras, who won the boxing event at the Olympic Games of 464 BC. To this, he added four victories at the Isthmian Games and two each at the Nemean and Pythian Games. His eldest son, Damagetus, won the pankration in 452 and 448 BC. At the latter, he was joined in victory by his brother Acusilaus, who won the boxing competition. Diagoras was present to witness his sons

achieving Olympic glory at the same games, and the triumphant brothers picked him up and carried him on their shoulders through the cheering crowd of spectators, who showered all three with flowers.

The third and youngest brother, Dorieus, turned out to be the greatest athlete of them all. He won the pankration three times at Olympia—in 432, 428, and 424 BC. To these, he added four Pythian, seven Nemean, and eight Isthmian victories. When Rhodes was engaged in a war with Athens several years later, the Athenians took Dorieus prisoner. Because of their admiration for his athletic prowess, they set him free without asking for a ransom. He was captured again later by the Spartans, who had less regard for his fame as an athlete and executed him.

Although not as successful as the previous two generations, the third generation of this family also produced Olympic victors. Diagoras's two daughters each gave birth to a son who grew up to win a boxing title at the Olympic Games. Statues of all six of the Diagorid family victors were erected at Olympia.

## Phayllus the Long Jumper

The ancient Olympic Games also featured the pentathlon, which included discus throwing, javelin hurling, wrestling, the stade, and the long jump. The last event was the specialty of Phayllus of Croton, who was famous not just for his skill at this challenging event but also because he was a war hero. He commanded a ship at the decisive Battle of Salamis in 480 BC, at which the fleet of the united Greek city-states defeated the Persian navy, ensuring Greece's independence.

Phayllus won the pentathlon at Delphi twice and achieved an additional victory running in the stade. He set the record for the longest jump ever in antiquity by soaring an astonishing distance of 55 feet. This was so far that he sailed past the end of the 50-foot sand pit and crashed onto the hard ground, breaking his leg. Although he never managed to take first place at the Olympic Games, the combination of his military record and that mighty leap resulted in his name being placed among the great athletes of all time.

These athletes lived during the Classical age of Greece, but the Olympic Games continued throughout antiquity and well into the Roman period. They died out around the beginning of the 5th century AD, likely due to Christian disapproval of what was seen as a pagan festival. The Roman era produced its own crop of champion athletes, among them a father–son duo named Marcus Aurelius Demetrius and Marcus Aurelius Asclepiades, who lived at the peak of the Roman Empire during the 2nd century AD.

As the careers of these champions demonstrate, in antiquity, just as today, athletes were much-admired figures, and sports offered a way for individuals to gain fame, wealth, and eternal glory.

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# 6



## Jugurtha of Numidia: African Freedom Fighter

In the last decade of the 2nd century BC, a North African prince named Jugurtha defied the Roman Republic and struggled to keep his homeland of Numidia from falling into Rome's grasping claws. When examining his story, discerning his true personality and motives is difficult. The only sources were written by the Romans, who were more concerned with his effects on Roman history and politics than what his career revealed about Numidian or African history. In recent years, historians have become more interested in considering the Roman Empire and history in general from non-Western and non-elite perspectives. In this lecture, you'll examine Jugurtha as a test case for this approach. Was he a dangerous rebel against legitimate authority or a freedom fighter who stood up against injustice and imperialism? Was he a terrorist or the head of a righteous resistance movement?

## The Unlikely Heir

The large and powerful kingdom of Numidia was located along the coast of North Africa. It was famed for its warriors—particularly its exceptional light cavalry—and had been a valuable ally of Rome during the Punic Wars. Rome won those wars, and Numidia also profited by gaining influence and territory in North Africa at the expense of the vanquished Carthaginian Empire. For nearly a century after the Second Punic War, the ties of loyalty and friendship between Rome and Numidia held firm, but as the 2nd century BC came to a close, two parallel tensions pushed the two sides toward war.

The first was that the Romans were always a bit paranoid about potential rivals, and Numidia had grown so powerful that Rome viewed it with suspicion and concern. The second was that a succession conflict was brewing in Numidia. The elderly king, Micipsa, had two sons who were contenders for the throne: Adherbal and Hiempsal. However, a third candidate was Jugurtha, an illegitimate son of Micipsa's brother. Although not technically in the line of succession, Jugurtha was the eldest of the three and was popular among many of the Numidians.

Despite Jugurtha's popularity, he would not have been a serious contender were it not for Micipsa's ill-conceived attempt to remove him as a player in Numidian politics. When the Romans asked Micipsa to provide support for their campaign in Spain, he dispatched some troops and appointed young Jugurtha as their commander. In the end, the plan backfired spectacularly, since Jugurtha's service with the Romans ended up catapulting him into a much stronger position. He gained invaluable battlefield experience, knowledge of Roman military strategy and tactics, and opportunities to display his natural leadership abilities.

Just as importantly, Jugurtha befriended the Roman general, Scipio Aemilianus, who wrote the ancient equivalent of a recommendation letter to Micipsa. This letter plainly stated that Rome preferred Jugurtha as the future ruler of Numidia. As Rome's client, Micipsa had no choice but to take his patron's wishes seriously, so he officially adopted Jugurtha, thereby making him a legal contender for the throne alongside his sons.



## The Sole Ruler

Despite Rome's expressed favoritism of Jugurtha, Micipsa was not about to abandon his sons. His solution was to declare all three his joint heirs and to urge them to rule together harmoniously after his death. When he died in 118 BC, the three rivals agreed to carve Numidia into thirds, with each ruling his own section. However, this plan failed almost immediately when Jugurtha ambushed Hiempsal and assassinated him. Numidia erupted into a civil war, with some favoring Jugurtha and others Adherbal. The two met in battle, and although Adherbal had the larger force, Jugurtha was more experienced and skillful. Adherbal's army was soundly defeated, and he fled to Rome and implored the Senate to appoint him as Numidia's rightful ruler.

Seemingly unperturbed by Jugurtha's murder of Hiempsal, the Senate decreed that Numidia be split between the two remaining claimants. While making a show of accepting Rome's settlement, Jugurtha began a series of raids into Adherbal's territory and eventually provoked Adherbal into an all-out attack against him. In 112 BC, the two armies encamped near the capital city of Cirta, and Jugurtha demonstrated his superior military acumen by launching a night attack against Adherbal's unsuspecting, slumbering men.

The assault was a complete success, but Adherbal escaped his army's destruction and fled into the fortified city of Cirta. While Jugurtha laid siege to Cirta, Adherbal dispatched messengers to Rome to plead for intervention in the conflict. Rome sent a three-man senatorial commission to Cirta, but Jugurtha either sweet-talked or bribed them into leaving almost as soon as they arrived. Once they were off the scene, Jugurtha resumed the siege, prompting another commission to be sent to Numidia. This time, the commissioners sternly demanded that Jugurtha lift the siege and withdraw his forces.

Believing that Jugurtha would obey the senatorial dictates and meekly go away, the Italian merchants in Cirta convinced Adherbal to surrender. However, Jugurtha promptly seized the city and captured Adherbal, whom he tortured and executed. The Romans did not seem upset by this act, but what created problems was that while Jugurtha's army was taking possession of Cirta, his troops massacred some of the inhabitants, including the Italian

merchants. The Roman historian Sallust claims that Jugurtha ordered the murder of the Italians, but this seems an atypically foolish decision by an astute leader.



Adherbal

## Conflict with Rome

As Jugurtha enjoyed the favor of one political faction in Rome, the massacre at Cirta might have gone unpunished. However, a rival faction stirred up the people and pushed for a military response. Accordingly, a Roman army under the command of Lucius Cornelius Bestia was dispatched to punish Jugurtha in 111 BC, but Bestia merely carried out some half-hearted raids until Jugurtha was able to negotiate a peace settlement.

Nevertheless, internal Roman political factionalism intervened to overturn the peace treaty. A populist, anti-senatorial faction declared that several senators had been bribed into granting Jugurtha unjustly lenient terms. A series of fiery speeches worked the people into a frenzy, and Jugurtha was forced to travel to Rome to answer the charges of bribery. Although he was spared from potentially implicating himself when a sympathetic tribune blocked his testimony, the popular party's response was to promote Jugurtha's cousin as a rival candidate for the throne of Numidia.

This cousin, Massiva, who was also present in Rome, was a threat that Jugurtha could not tolerate. Jugurtha had Massiva murdered, but the assassin was captured. For the Romans, this act occurred while Massiva was officially their guest and thus constituted a serious transgression. In 110 BC, they officially declared war against Jugurtha and sent another army to Numidia under the command of Spurius Postumus Albinus.

Jugurtha avoided meeting the Romans in open battle and instead waged a guerrilla war. His cavalry's superior mobility allowed him to stage hit-and-run raids against the cumbersome Roman army. When Albinus returned to Rome to take part in elections and left his inexperienced brother, Aulus Albinus, in charge, Jugurtha was able to lure the Romans into the rough hinterland. Simultaneously, he sowed disaffection among them through bribes and propaganda. Then, he secretly gathered all his forces, launched a daring night assault, and routed the demoralized Roman army.

## Jugurtha versus Gaius Marius

In 109 BC, the Romans sent another army under another commander, the highly competent Quintus Caecilius Metellus. His staff comprised a number of gifted commanders, including his protégé, Gaius Marius. At the Battle of Muthul River, Jugurtha once again ambushed the Roman army. However, the improved Roman leadership and well-disciplined troops endured the initial shock and battled back effectively.

Jugurtha reverted to guerrilla tactics and swift raids. Metellus countered by waging a war of attrition, devastating the countryside, burning farms and crops, killing livestock, and capturing strongpoints to deprive Jugurtha and his men of food and support from the Numidian populace. The war evolved into an ugly stalemate, with Jugurtha constantly harassing the Romans and pouncing on small, isolated contingents of soldiers and the Romans laying waste to the land to wear down the defenders.

The conflict dragged on into 108 BC. Metellus forced Jugurtha to fight another battle against him, which the Romans decisively won. To gain new troops, Jugurtha forged alliances with several African tribes, including a neighboring ruler, King Bocchus of the Mauri. In 107 BC, events took a

dramatic turn when Gaius Marius was elected Roman consul and betrayed Metellus by taking command of the war. Unfortunately for Jugurtha, he now faced one of the greatest Roman generals.

Over the next 2 years, Marius steadily ground down the Numidians and their allies by continuing Metellus's strategy of devastating the country. Jugurtha and Bocchus realized that they could not sustain a prolonged conflict, so they gambled everything on two massive battles near Cirta in 107 BC. Although Jugurtha displayed his tactical brilliance, in the end, he could not overcome the weight and discipline of the Roman war machine. He managed to evade Marius until 105 BC, when Marius convinced Bocchus to betray Jugurtha. On January 1, 104 BC, Marius rode through the streets of Rome in triumph, with Jugurtha in chains. Afterward, Jugurtha was cast into prison, where he suffered an ignominious death.

Ultimately, Jugurtha was both a freedom fighter and a rebel. He was an exceptionally able and talented man, but he was also ambitious and ruthless. He was an advocate of Numidian independence and autonomy but aspired to be the absolute ruler of his country. His downfall had less to do with his own decisions than that he got ensnared in the vicious internal politics of the expanding Roman Empire.

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7



## Mithridates of Pontus: Rome's Implacable Foe

**O**ne of the most implacable, resourceful, and colorful enemies to ever fight the Romans was King Mithridates VI of Pontus, located on the southern shore of the Black Sea. His life story features amazing triumphs, disastrous defeats, and astonishing comebacks. It includes horrific massacres, a slew of poisonings, a miracle drug, and a plethora of supernatural omens. This lecture is about a memorable character whose entire life was attended by numerous supernatural events that allegedly foretold his reign and actions.



## Comets and Poisons

In the religions of the eastern Mediterranean, comets were portents promising the arrival of a great leader—often a liberator or messiah. Mithridates's birth in 135 BC coincided with the appearance of one that sported an unusual, curved tail. Furthermore, while he was still a baby, lightning supposedly struck near his crib, leaving him with a scar on his forehead shaped like a crown. This event was interpreted as a sign that the child was destined for greatness. His ancestry also dictated that he would do amazing things. From his mother's family, he claimed descent from Alexander the Great, while on his father's side, he was related to Darius I.

Besides the typical pursuits expected of a prince, Mithridates was fascinated with poisons and their antidotes. He avidly studied the plants, animals, and other substances that could yield toxic extracts and performed experiments to test their properties. He realized that a substance that might prove deadly in large amounts could be beneficial in smaller ones and that immunity to a deadly poison might be built up by regularly consuming small, nonlethal doses. He eventually crafted a special potion that allegedly granted immunity to all poisons, which came to be known as *mithridatium*.

Mithridates's interest in antidotes appeared to be well warranted. In 120 BC, his father, the king, died apparently of poison. The assassin was never identified, although the Romans and the queen of Pontus—Mithridates's mother—were suspects. Mithridates and his younger brother were proclaimed co-kings in 119 BC, but because Mithridates was still a minor, his mother served as regent. Coinciding with his accession, a second comet with a curved tail appeared—an omen that seemed to confirm that he was favored by the gods.



However, Mithridates's immediate concern was to stay alive. He feared that he might be assassinated too, so he left the capital of Sinope and hid in the countryside until he came of age. After several years in the wilderness, he returned to Sinope to claim the throne. He was welcomed by the people—and, more importantly, by the army. His mother and brother died shortly thereafter under mysterious circumstances, and the suspicion was that Mithridates had poisoned them.

## The New Alexander the Great

Pontus was only one of several relatively modest eastern Mediterranean kingdoms jostling for influence in the region, and the great empire of the day was the rapidly expanding Roman Republic. Mithridates dreamed of becoming a new Alexander and building a great empire centered around the Black Sea, but for the moment, he sought to build up Pontus without antagonizing Rome. Between 115 and 95 BC, he tripled the size of Pontus by campaigning along the eastern and northern edges of the Black Sea. He annexed some areas outright and persuaded others—most notably, the fierce horsemen of Scythia—to become his allies.

Mithridates's next move was to exert control over Cappadocia by arranging the assassination of the current king and the installation of a puppet ruler. Cappadocia was on the fringe of the Roman sphere of influence, but fortunately for Mithridates, the Romans were distracted by their war against Jugurtha. Then, Mithridates launched a joint invasion of Paphlagonia with the king of Bithynia. Rome also thought of Paphlagonia as lying within its zone of influence, and this time, the Roman general Marius was sent to Pontus to order Mithridates out of Cappadocia and Paphlagonia.

Needing a strong ally, Mithridates joined with Tigranes, the king of Armenia. In 94 BC, the king of Bithynia died, and Mithridates took advantage of the power vacuum to place his puppet king on the throne. Rome was again distracted by a more urgent conflict—the Social War—so Mithridates and Tigranes moved against Cappadocia. Tigranes rampaged through the region and plundered it while Mithridates installed one of his sons as its ruler.

This was too much for Rome, so in 89 BC, it dispatched Manius Aquillius at the head of a huge army to recapture Bithynia and Cappadocia and punish Mithridates.

Still wishing to avoid outright war with Rome, Mithridates pulled his forces back from Bithynia. Aquillius reinstated the former ruler, Nicomedes IV, and then demanded that Nicomedes repay the enormous debts his country owed Rome. When Nicomedes protested that he had no money, Aquillius instructed him to raid some of Pontus's wealthy cities. This outcome was exactly what Mithridates was hoping for. He wanted the Romans to initiate a war so that he could portray himself as a victim of imperialism and rally those who resented Rome's arrogance and chafed under its oppressive taxation to his cause.

For the battle against Aquillius and Nicomedes, Mithridates prepared chariots with scythes attached to their wheel hubs. Once Nicomedes's phalanx was bunched tightly together, the chariots were unleashed against the immobile soldiers. The whirling blades inflicted enormous slaughter—literally dicing up Nicomedes's troops. The survivors of this butchery, including Nicomedes, fled the field.

## Terror across Asia Minor

After this crushing defeat, Aquillius and the Romans had no choice but to retreat. Mithridates triumphantly marched across Asia Minor, seizing city after city, most of which eagerly opened their gates to a man they



Mithridates

saw as a liberator freeing them from the shackles of Roman oppression. Mithridates embraced this identity as a magnanimous savior by canceling debts for the poor, proclaiming the wealthy free from taxation, restoring liberties to cities, and even freeing captured soldiers and allowing them to return home rather than enslaving them.

In the major city of Pergamon, Mithridates delivered a public oration in which he justified his war. He proclaimed,

The Romans have aroused intense hatred among all peoples due to the rapacity of their governors, the greed of their tax collectors, and the injustice of their law courts. ... The Romans simply have the disposition of wolves—an insatiable appetite for blood, and a boundless hunger for power and wealth.

Aquillius was captured in the city of Mytilene by a mob of citizens, who gleefully turned him over to Mithridates. In front of a huge crowd gathered in the public theater of Pergamon, a sack of gold coins was melted down, Aquillius's jaws were pried open, and the molten gold was poured down his throat. This cruel method of execution was deemed an appropriate repayment for the Romans' greedy exploitation and theft of the region's wealth.

While the justice of Aquillius's execution might be argued, Mithridates's next deed of vengeance against the Romans was unquestionably a moral transgression—one so severe that a modern historian describes it as “terrorism, genocide, and a crime against humanity.” Mithridates orchestrated the wholesale massacre of Roman citizens across the entire region. In a single day, more than 80,000 Roman men, women, and children were slaughtered in dozens of cities throughout Anatolia and the islands of the Aegean. Even those Romans who sought sanctuary in temples—a time-honored and universally respected tradition—were brutally dragged away from the altars and butchered.

## The Second and Third Mithridatic Wars

In 87 BC, a third comet—known today as Halley's Comet—blazed across the sky. The Romans viewed it as an omen of their potential doom, while in the east, it confirmed Mithridates's status as the savior who would free the people from Roman enslavement. He dispatched an army and navy to liberate Greece from Roman rule, while he remained in Asia Minor to oversee affairs. He seemed unstoppable, especially because Rome was still engaged in the Social War. Nevertheless, the Romans could not afford to ignore Mithridates, so they tasked Lucius Cornelius Sulla with defeating him.

As one of Rome's finest generals, Sulla defeated the Pontic forces and almost annihilated them. However, he was under great pressure to conclude the campaign quickly and return to Rome, as his political rivals were starting to move against him. In 85 BC, Mithridates and Sulla met at Dardanus and agreed on peace terms. Mithridates had to withdraw from Bithynia, Cappadocia, and Paphlagonia and pay a sizable sum to Rome.

Nevertheless, tensions between Mithridates and Rome continued to simmer over the next decade. The general that Sulla left behind in Asia Minor raided Pontic territory, provoking a military response from Mithridates. This conflict, sometimes called the Second Mithridatic War, lasted from 83 to 81 BC and ended inconclusively. By the mid-70s BC, however, Mithridates was again eyeing Cappadocia and Bithynia, and he renewed his old alliance with Tigranes.

Once more, Mithridates led a massive army through Asia Minor and captured the disputed territories, and Rome again reacted by dispatching one of its most able generals against him. The resultant Third Mithridatic War, which lasted from 73 to 63 BC, pitted Mithridates against Lucullus. According to Plutarch, at Otryae, "just as the battle was about to be joined, the sky suddenly burst asunder and a huge flaming body was observed to fall between the two armies." This has been interpreted as a meteor strike, and the two sides were so terrified by it that they declined to engage and departed the field.

Eventually, Lucullus invaded Pontus. After suffering defeat at the Battle of Kabeira in 70 BC, Mithridates escaped to his old ally, Tigranes. In 69 BC, Lucullus marched into Armenia, and Tigranes mustered a gigantic army



to oppose him. They met at the Battle of Tigranocerta, and Tigranes was thoroughly routed. Undaunted, Tigranes fought a second battle at Artaxata the next year. Although Lucullus emerged notionally as the victor, his men were exhausted and disgruntled that they had not gained the booty to which they felt entitled. They mutinied and demanded that Lucullus call off the invasion and return home.

In 76 BC, Mithridates rallied a new force and struck at the Roman troops occupying Pontus. By beating them, he recaptured his crown and kingdom. Thus, Rome dispatched Pompey the Great, who stormed into Pontus in 66 BC and won decisively. Mithridates fled again, and some reports say that bereft of allies and in despair, he holed up in a Crimean fortress at Pantikaion, where he attempted to poison himself. However, the immunity that he had carefully built up thwarted his efforts. Finally, at Mithridates's urging, his devoted bodyguard stabbed him to death.

After Mithridates's alleged death in the Crimea, a corpse was sent to Pompey as proof of his demise. When it arrived, the face was so decayed that identification was impossible. Thus, a remote chance exists that the ever-resourceful Mithridates escaped his pursuers one final time and lived the rest of his life beyond the knowledge of recorded history.

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# 8



## Strabo and Pausanias: Describers of the World

If you had to create a comprehensive description of the world or even your own country, how would you go about it? These were the challenges faced by the two authors who are the focus of this lecture: Strabo and Pausanias. Strabo wrote a massive geographical survey of the entire Earth called the *Geography*, while Pausanias authored a detailed description of the cities and monuments of Greece—a work that could be considered the first tourist guidebook. Although Strabo lived at the time of Augustus in the early 1st century AD and Pausanias came along more than a century later at the height of the Roman Empire, they were both pioneers in the field of geography.

## Strabo's Geography

Strabo was born around 64 BC in the city of Amasia in Pontus. He was from a well-off provincial elite family and enjoyed an excellent education. He studied with a succession of well-known philosophers and intellectuals and was friends with several high-ranking Roman officials, including the governor of Egypt, Aelius Gallus, whom he accompanied on a mission up the Nile River. Strabo's first literary effort was a sequel to Polybius's *Histories*, but it has been lost. He then turned his attention to his great *Geography*, which he characterized as a *kolossourgia*—a “colossus of a work.”

Strabo's opus runs to almost half a million words in length and is organized into 17 books. One of his qualifications for writing *Geography* was that he had journeyed extensively around the Mediterranean. He subscribed to the prevailing interpretation of world geography during his time: that there were three land masses, Europe, Asia, and Libya, which was the term he used for Africa. The Mediterranean Sea lay at the center of these land masses, and all three were surrounded by an ocean forming the edge of the world. Within the bounds of the ocean was the *Oikoumene*, which Strabo defined as “the world which we inhabit and know.”

The first two books of *Geography* state Strabo's purpose, methods, and terms. The remaining 15 proceed methodically through the *Oikoumene*, chronicling each region's geography, major cities, flora, and fauna and occasionally making historical remarks. This world survey begins with the Iberian Peninsula and then moves in a roughly clockwise direction, circling the Mediterranean. It includes Britain, Gaul, Italy, Sicily, North Africa, Germany, Pannonia, Illyria, Thrace, Macedonia, and Greece. It also describes the lands of Asia Minor, Persia, India, Syria, Phoenicia, Judea, Mesopotamia, Arabia, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Libya.

On the whole, Strabo did not insert himself into the work, but he occasionally referenced something he witnessed. One example took place during the Egyptian expedition with Aelius:

In the city of Arsinoë, which in early times was called Krokodilopolis ... there is a sacred crocodile which is kept in a lake and is fed, and is tame to the priests. It is named Suchus;

and it is fed grain, pieces of meat, and wine. ... Our host, one of the officials there ... went with us to the lake, carrying a kind of cake, some roasted meat, and a pitcher of wine mixed with honey. We found the animal lying on the edge of the lake. The priests went up to it and some of them opened its mouth and another placed into it the cake, then the meat, and then poured in the honey mixture. The animal then leapt into the lake and rushed to the far side.

## Facts versus Myths

Strabo tried hard to present information factually and scientifically. However, when dealing with far-off lands that he had not personally visited, he was forced to rely on rumors and secondhand accounts—many of which contained fantastic elements that strained credibility. In the interest of completeness, he sometimes repeated implausible stories of monsters and bizarre creatures recounted by earlier writers but added a comment stating that he did not find them credible.

For example, he mentioned that in far-off lands, some races of people had gigantic ears that reached down to their feet and that they rolled up to sleep. Others had dog's ears or feet that were attached backward. Still others lacked mouths and nourished themselves by inhaling the odors of roasted meat, fruits, and flowers. Strabo dismissed these stories as obviously ridiculous. Interestingly, however, he also included a defense of the previous writers who told them:

Surely it is self-evident that they are weaving in myths intentionally, not through an ignorance of the facts, but through an intentional act of invention of the impossible, in order to gratify the [readers'] taste for the marvelous and the entertaining.

Sometimes, he subjected fanciful-sounding anecdotes to critical evaluation and proposed an alternative rational explanation. An example is his discussion of the origins of the Myrmidons—the “ant people.” According to a myth, they were once ants who had been transformed into militant, industrious humans in response to a prayer. Strabo proposed a more logical interpretation: that this Thessalian Greek tribe acquired the name because they were particularly adept at excavating the soil and lived in homes dug into the ground.

Additionally, some of the far-fetched tales that Strabo related were correct. For example, he recounted that in India, “among certain tribes, wives were glad to be burned up along with their deceased husbands, and that those who would not submit to it were held in disgrace.” This was a fairly accurate description of the Indian practice of suttee. In this instance, Strabo did seem to believe the story but noted that several reputable authors had reported this custom as factual.

Although Strabo was not the first ancient author to write a geographic description of the world, his is the work that survives and, as such, serves as an invaluable source of information about the classical world and its civilizations. In this sense, *Geography* is the forerunner of all atlases and geographic writings.

## Pausanias the Mystery Man

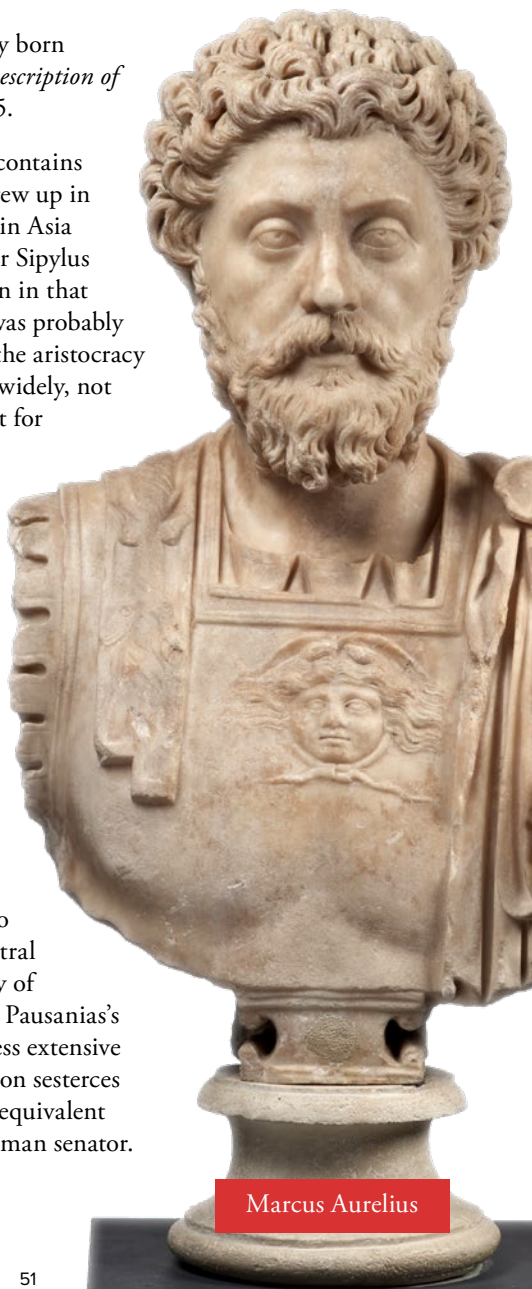
In contrast to Strabo, Pausanias narrowed the focus to chronicle just one country and its monuments. Thus, he created a genre of writing that is especially popular today: the tourist guidebook. Written nearly 2,000 years ago, his *Description of Greece* is the great-grandfather of all such guides.

Pausanias never provided an autobiographical sketch of himself, so information about him and his life must be pieced together from comments scattered throughout his work. He mentioned the names of certain Roman emperors but stopped with Marcus Aurelius, suggesting that the composition date of his work did not extend beyond Aurelius’s death in AD 180. Other internal references indicate that he began writing around AD 150 and that the entire text probably took some 20 years of effort. From this and other details,

one can extrapolate that he was likely born around AD 115 and that he wrote *Description of Greece* between the ages of 40 and 65.

As for where he was from, the work contains several comments that indicate he grew up in the neighborhood of Mount Sipylus in Asia Minor. The most important city near Sipylus was Magnesia, and if he was not born in that city, then he was from close by. He was probably from a wealthy family belonging to the aristocracy of Magnesia. He traveled incredibly widely, not as part of an army or for business but for pleasure—something that was only possible for a very wealthy person.

Pausanias journeyed throughout mainland Greece and Asia Minor along the eastern edge of the Mediterranean, including Syria and Palestine, and as far east as the Euphrates River. He traveled extensively in Egypt, the coastal regions, the pyramids, the oasis of Siwa, and at least as far up the Nile as the city of Thebes. He went north to Byzantium and also visited many of the Greek islands, including Rhodes and Delos. He also ventured far to the west, touring central and southern Italy, including the Bay of Naples and the capital city of Rome. Pausanias's contemporary Apuleius undertook less extensive travels but reported spending 1 million sesterces on his journeys—a colossal amount equivalent to the minimum required to be a Roman senator. Pausanias's trips would have cost even more.



Marcus Aurelius



## A Guidebook for All Time

Pausanias's *Description of Greece* is divided into 10 books that collectively constitute a guidebook for visiting Greece in the 2nd century AD. It incorporates frequent and sometimes lengthy digressions on history, mythology, and religion. A book on a particular region often begins with a general introduction that lays out the most important of its local stories. For instance, the first book provides a detailed tour through the cemeteries of Athens and tells readers not only where to find various graves and memorials but also their significance in Greek history. In addition, Pausanias was particularly interested in sites and objects related to religion and preferred older monuments over newer ones.

Pausanias did not enjoy fame or appreciation until recently. According to the modern scholar Christian Habicht, "The work was a complete failure. It was not read—there is not a single mention of the author, not a single quotation from it, not a whisper, before the 6th century." It remained obscure throughout the Middle Ages, with only two or three references to it. Its earliest surviving manuscript is a 15th-century copy, and even during the 19th century, it was savagely criticized and disparaged by scholars.

Fortunately, in recent decades, Pausanias's reputation has been rehabilitated. Research has established that he had indeed visited the various places he discussed and that his descriptions are largely reliable and accurate. He is still a relevant and evocative guide for many sites in Greece. At Epidaure, one can still see the great theater that he praised for its beauty and symmetry, as well as the Sanctuary of Asclepius, for which he provided a detailed background. Some of the sculptural programs and inscribed slabs he described at the site can still be observed in the nearby archaeological museum.

Also contributing to the rise in Pausanias's prestige are archaeologists, who are grateful for his guidance in reconstructing the sites they are excavating; ancient historians, who appreciate his in-depth excursions on Greek history and civilization; and anthropologists and religious scholars, who value his extensive comments on Greek myth and religion. Finally, the massive popularity and growth of global tourism have intensified interest in guidebooks and the history of tourism.

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# 9



## Clodia Metelli: Scandalous Woman of Rome?

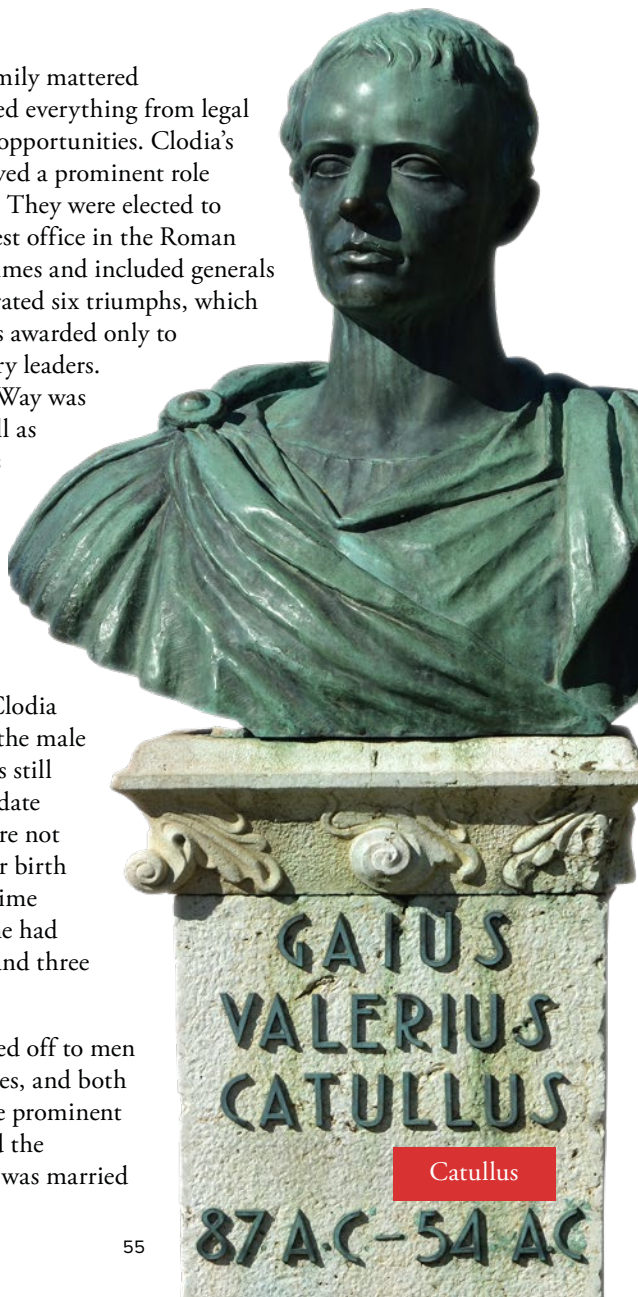
One of the most frequently lamented gaps in the study of antiquity is that ancient authors focus almost exclusively on men, and only a handful of women appear in the primary sources. One of these is Clodia Metelli, who lived during the last decades of the Roman Republic. Two of the most famous Roman authors of the period, the great orator and statesman Cicero and the renowned poet Catullus, wrote about her at length. This lecture introduces a woman who was portrayed as a promiscuous degenerate, and yet she was an influential player in Roman politics. Was she the loathsome Palatine Medea, or was she a strong-willed, respected, and influential woman? You be the judge.

## The Claudians

For Rome's elites, one's family mattered enormously and determined everything from legal rights to social status and opportunities. Clodia's family, the Claudians, played a prominent role in shaping Rome's history. They were elected to the consulship—the highest office in the Roman state—no fewer than 28 times and included generals in Rome's wars who celebrated six triumphs, which were lavish victory parades awarded only to the most successful military leaders. Furthermore, the Appian Way was built by a Claudian, as well as one of the main aqueducts that brought water to Rome.

The Claudians enjoyed wealth, prestige, power, and influence. This was particularly true during the Late Republic, when Clodia lived. Extensive details of the male Claudians' political careers still survive, but Clodia's birthdate and her mother's name were not recorded. Nevertheless, her birth must have occurred sometime during the 90s BC, and she had five siblings—two sisters and three brothers.

Clodia's sisters were married off to men from other eminent families, and both of her brothers-in-law were prominent generals who also achieved the consulship. Clodia herself was married



Catullus

to the eldest son of another of Rome's most distinguished and powerful families, the Metelli. Due to elite Roman families' habit of marrying one another, Clodia's husband, Quintus Metellus Celer, was already related to her; in fact, he was her first cousin. The couple had one daughter named Metella, but it did not seem to be a happy marriage.

Of Clodia's three brothers, the eldest, Appius Claudius Pulcher, was an officer in the Roman legions and attached to the staff of one of the most able generals of the day, a man named Lucullus, who was married to one of their sisters. Appius was appointed governor to a succession of Roman provinces and served as consul and censor as well. The middle brother had a less stellar but still solid career. The youngest brother, Publius Claudius Pulcher, was the black sheep of the family, and it was his actions that dragged Clodia into the public spotlight.

## The Bona Dea Affair

Like Appius, Publius wrangled an appointment as an officer on Lucullus's staff. However, he disgraced himself by fomenting a mutiny among the common legionaries. Back in Rome, he became embroiled in a scandalous episode. Bona Dea was an important Roman goddess in whose honor a secret set of rites of worship were performed each year by a group of women drawn from the elite families of Rome. Men were excluded, but in 62 BC, Publius disguised himself as a woman to infiltrate the rites overseen by Pompeia, Julius Caesar's wife. Worse, Publius allegedly tried to seduce Pompeia.

During Publius's trial for sacrilege, Marcus Tullius Cicero, a member of the traditionalist Optimates—literally, the “best people”—was most upset by Publius's transgression and provided evidence against him. Shockingly, the jury voted to acquit him, supposedly due to lavish bribes. Therefore, Publius and Cicero became bitter enemies. Setting himself up in direct opposition to the Optimates and his own family, Publius joined the Populares—the populist or people's party—and legally changed his name to Publius Clodius Pulcher. The Claudian family had two branches—the aristocratic Claudians and the plebeian Clodians—and the latter's spelling and pronunciation fitted with Clodius aligning himself with the Populares.

Around 60 BC, Celer unexpectedly died. Previously, Clodia had more or less remained in her husband's shadow and had not displayed any obvious political inclinations of her own. Now, Clodia asserted herself and became an avid supporter of her Populares-aligned brother. As an open sign of this allegiance, she too switched from being known as Claudia—her original name—to styling herself as Clodia.

## The Trial of Caelius

Things came to a head in 56 BC with the trial of Caelius—an event that was a manifestation of the ongoing political war between the Optimates and the Populares. Cicero and other leading Optimates were among those who spoke in Caelius's defense, while Clodius and his allies were involved in the prosecution. Caelius was one of Clodia's lovers, and she had loaned him a large sum of money, which he then used to attempt to assassinate a foreign ambassador. In a speech Cicero delivered at the trial, he portrayed Caelius as a young, well-intentioned, and gullible innocent who had been seduced and manipulated by the predatory and lascivious Clodia.

Cicero's oration characterized Clodia as rampantly promiscuous, and he darkly hinted that her husband Celer's premature death was not due to natural causes but was the result of her poisoning him. More sensationally, he suggested that her staunch support of Clodius was not due to familial loyalty but because they were engaged in an incestuous affair. Cicero even labeled her the Palatine Medea—an allusion to the prestigious neighborhood in Rome where both Clodia and Cicero lived, Palatine Hill, and to Medea, an infamous and murderous woman of myth who seduced and manipulated the Greek hero, Jason.

Interestingly, Cicero had previously spoken of Clodia very differently in private letters to his friends and associates. In a letter from 62 BC, Cicero mentioned enlisting Clodia—still known as Claudia at that time—to smooth over a disagreement between him and Celer. Moreover, in several letters from 59 BC, Clodia appeared as an indirect route of political communication between Cicero and Clodius. As scholars point out, such letters indicate the sort of influential behind-the-scenes role that well-connected women like Clodia could play in Roman society and politics.



Indeed, Clodia's loan to Caelius showed that she had access to considerable wealth and the independent legal status to control how it was used. After Celer's death, she seemed to have an atypical degree of autonomy and could wield informal power. Her last appearance in the sources occurs in 45 BC, when Cicero wanted to purchase a garden estate to build a memorial shrine for his deceased daughter. Among the properties he most desired was one owned by Clodia, and letters trace negotiations between her and Cicero's agent. Cicero's attitude was that of one Roman elite dealing with another well-respected member of the same group. These letters also illustrate how much financial power and legal independence Clodia enjoyed.

## The Spurned Poet

The second major source that discusses Clodia is a set of poems written by her ex-lover, Catullus. Because she was married at the time of their affair, he could not address her directly but instead labeled her with the pseudonym *Lesbia*. Although some scholars have debated *Lesbia*'s identity, compelling evidence shows that she was indeed Clodia. Catullus's poems trace the entire course of their relationship, which started with an early blissful phase. However, she eventually broke up with him.

Clodia's rejection transformed Catullus's once ardent love into an equally intense hatred, and he furiously scribbled poems in which he raged against her, schizophrenically accusing her of riotous promiscuity while asserting that no one would ever desire her again. Here's a sample: "Good riddance to her, and let her live with her 300 lovers, clasp and grinding against all of them, over and over again, but truly loving none." And then, "You cursed slut, you'll be sorry, when no one longs for you at night. What life now is left for you? Who will visit you? ... Whose lips will you nibble now?"

Coupled with Cicero's slanderous portrait of her, this image of Clodia has emerged as the dominant one. Given these men's strong motives for character assassination, can what they say about her be believed? Indeed, she had extramarital affairs, which would have been officially frowned upon in Roman society, but such affairs were common. Many women—and men—were known to have had them, but none incurred the amount of censure that Clodia suffered at the hands of Cicero and Catullus.

Due to the significant gaps in knowledge about Clodia's life, such as when she died, the true nature of her character and motivations remain mysterious. The lack of well-rounded portraits of Roman women reflects their lowly status in Roman society, and Clodia is one of the few women of this era discussed in any detail at all.

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# 10



## Sextus Pompey: He Could Have Been Emperor

**R**oman history has no shortage of famous and influential individuals, and at or near the top of that list is Octavian. The adopted son of Julius Caesar, he emerged as the supreme power after Caesar's assassination in 44 BC. While the world-altering achievements of Octavian are familiar, what is less commonly realized is that he had a rival who was like his twin and who might have become the first emperor in his place. This lecture is about that man: Sextus Pompey. Today, he is all but forgotten, but had he taken advantage of several key opportunities in which the entire Roman world was within his grasp, history might have unfolded very differently. and Pausanias came along more than a century later at the height of the Roman Empire, they were both pioneers in the field of geography.

## Octavian's Doppelgänger

Almost the same age, Sextus and Octavian had many similarities. While Octavian was the son of the most famous general and politician of the era, Sextus was the son of the second most famous. Pompeius Magnus—or Pompey the Great—was Caesar's lifelong archrival. Born as Gnaeus Pompey, he held the highest office in the Roman state at an unprecedentedly young age, defeated the revolt of Spartacus, wiped out the scourge of pirates across the entire Mediterranean, and won an unbroken string of military victories from Spain in the west to Syria in the east.

Pompey was indisputably the top dog when the younger, up-and-coming Caesar provoked a civil war in 49 BC. The Senate turned to Pompey to save the republic, and over the next 4 years, the forces of Caesar clashed with those of Pompey and the Senate. In 48 BC, the war culminated at the Battle of Pharsalus in northern Greece. Caesar decisively crushed Pompey's legions, and Pompey collected his wife and youngest son Sextus and fled to Egypt, where he hoped to find refuge because it was still an independent nation. However, the Egyptians murdered him when he went ashore as Sextus watched from the deck of their ship.

Sextus fled to North Africa, where members of the Senate had gathered an army to oppose Caesar. Caesar pursued them and was again victorious at the Battle of Thapsus in 46 BC. Sextus escaped the carnage and fled once more—this time to Spain, where his older brother Gnaeus was raising more legions. On March 17, 45 BC, the armies of Gnaeus and Caesar clashed in the Battle of Munda. The fighting raged for 8 hours, and more than 30,000 Romans lay dead at the end. The badly wounded Gnaeus Pompey was soon hunted down and killed. Still in his early twenties, Sextus was the last surviving man in his family, and the burden of leading the opposition fell on his young shoulders.

Both Sextus's and Octavian's fathers met a sudden death by assassination, and in the aftermath of their respective fathers' deaths, they were initially overlooked and discounted as being too young and inexperienced to be serious contenders for control of the Roman world. Nevertheless, both ended up surprising everyone by becoming major players in the game for power.

In a final striking parallel, both Octavian and Sextus explicitly laid claim to their murdered fathers' mantles of authority by grafting elements of their father's names onto their own. After Caesar's murder, Octavian officially changed his name to Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus, and after Pompey's death, Sextus added his father's epithet of Magnus to his name, styling himself as Sextus Pompeius Magnus.

## The Commander of the Seas

Among those who jockeyed to step into the power vacuum when Julius Caesar was assassinated in 44 BC were the following: Caesar's right-hand man, Mark Antony; a prominent Caesarian lieutenant named Lepidus; the assassins led by Brutus and Cassius, who now called themselves the liberators; the rest of the senators not directly involved in the assassination; and other well-respected individuals.

Caesar's grandnephew Octavian was a long-shot candidate. In his will, Caesar posthumously adopted Octavian as his son, which let Octavian take Caesar's name as his own. Caesar's troops transferred their allegiance to the "new" Caesar, similar to Sextus's earlier situation as related by Appian: "Presently, however, those who had served with his father and brother ... drifted to him as their natural leader."

Meanwhile, Sextus took advantage of the confusion in Rome to build up his power in Spain. As he became a power in his own right and was viewed as his father's successor, he was courted by various factions. Prompted by Lepidus and Antony, the Senate bestowed official recognition upon Sextus as Pompey's heir. He was given financial compensation for his father's estates that Caesar had confiscated, and he was appointed Commander of the Seas—a title previously held by his father.

Soon, the contending groups coalesced into two factions. On one side was an uneasy alliance between Antony, Lepidus, and Octavian called the Second Triumvirate, and on the other were the assassins and the bulk of the Senate. As both sides readied for war, Sextus stayed aloof and concentrated

on solidifying his position. This caused him to be formally condemned by both Triumvirs and the Senate. Nevertheless, using his substantial navy, he captured the wealthy island of Sicily and made it his base.

Sextus welcomed and gave shelter to slaves, to whom he awarded freedom; average citizens who had fallen into debt; and wealthy aristocrats fleeing the Triumvirs. Due to respect for the Pompey name and his generous refugee policy, Sextus gained widespread admiration among the Roman people. By contrast, the Triumvirs instituted their infamous proscription policy, whereby they posted lists of their enemies' names, seized their property, and declared rewards for anyone who killed one of the proscribed. One of Sextus's finest acts was providing refuge to the proscribed and actively helping to rescue them.

## Missed Opportunities

Octavian responded by sending one of his generals and a fleet against Sextus, but in the naval battle that followed, Sextus won. The Triumvirs then shifted their focus to the liberators and the Senate, and by late 42 BC, they achieved victory by winning the Battle of Philippi in Macedonia. Sextus could have taken advantage of both sides being distracted in the east to extend his power in the west and perhaps even gain control of Italy and the city of Rome, but he was content to remain in his Sicilian stronghold. This was the first of several opportunities that he let slip through his hands.

The Triumvirs divided up control of the Roman world, with Antony taking the east, Octavian the west, and Lepidus Africa. Holding Sicily with a large and well-trained fleet, Sextus essentially ruled an independent empire within Octavian's sphere of influence. His dominance over the seas also meant that he could blockade Rome's food supply, which was so effective that riots broke out in the capital city among the starving populace. According to Appian, "Some persons think that if Pompey had then invaded Italy, which was wasted with famine and civil strife and was looking toward him favorably, he might easily have conquered it." But once again, Sextus was content to remain passive, and another opportunity went untaken.



Nonetheless, Sextus expanded his dominion by capturing the island of Sardinia from Octavian and establishing bases on the Italian mainland. In response, Octavian exerted his diplomatic skills to gain Antony's assistance against Sextus. Facing a united Antony and Octavian, Sextus intensified his blockade, completely severing the vital seaborne grain shipments to the city of Rome. Fed up, the people of Rome and Italy demanded peace, so Octavian and Antony proposed a peace conference to be held at Misenum in 39 BC.

The terms of the Treaty of Misenum were a remarkable acknowledgment of Sextus's power and elevated his standing almost to the Triumvirs' level. Antony, Octavian, and Sextus held several feasts to celebrate their accord. The first was aboard Sextus's flagship, and his subordinates urged him to murder the unguarded and helpless Antony and Octavian. However, Sextus rejected this advice as ignoble, and so he failed to take advantage of his best opportunity to dispose of his foes. Perhaps he simply could not bring himself to employ the same methods as his father's treacherous assassination.

## The War with Octavian

Unsurprisingly, war soon broke out between Sextus and the Triumvirs, with each side blaming the other for violating the terms of the treaty. Octavian took the lead in prosecuting the war against Sextus. He organized a two-pronged assault on Sicily, with his forces attacking from Italy and Lepidus's coming from Africa. Sextus's admiral won a solid victory in the Strait of Messina, and then a storm sank more of Octavian's surviving ships. Again, Sextus failed to grasp the opportunity to turn this naval success into a decisive victory in the war. He allowed the remnants of Octavian's fleet to escape and passed up the chance to attack Italy.

In 36 BC, Marcus Agrippa, Octavian's best friend and commander, fought a battle with his fleet against Sextus off the northern coast of Sicily, and for the first time, Octavian obtained a naval victory. However, in a follow-up naval battle at which he himself was in command, Octavian was defeated. Fortunately for him, Agrippa was in charge of the third, decisive battle at Naulochus in September of 36 BC.



Lepidus

Agrippa had devised a new weapon called the *harpax*—a giant harpoon attached to a rope shot from a ship. The impaled enemy ships could then be winched alongside and boarded. Between Agrippa's tactical skills and the *harpax*, Sextus's fleet was soundly beaten. Octavian's forces captured Sicily, and Sextus fled to the east, hoping to obtain sanctuary with Antony. However, one of Antony's lieutenants captured Sextus and summarily executed him.

With Sextus out of the way, the Triumvirs turned on one another, with Octavian eventually emerging as the victor. Winners get to write history, and it served Octavian's interests to downplay Sextus's role and try to erase him from the narrative. As for Sextus, whether he simply wanted to uphold his family's honor name, saw himself as defending the republic, or harbored dreams of gaining control over the Roman state is unclear. What is certain is

that he repeatedly failed to grasp chances that might have lifted him to the next level of political power and made him a legitimate contender to be the first emperor of Rome.

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# 11



## Marcus Agrippa: Augustus's Right-Hand Man

**W**hether Octavian would have emerged as the victor over his various rivals and become Rome's first emperor without Marcus Agrippa is questionable. General, admiral, engineer, architect, diplomat, administrator, and faithful friend—Agrippa excelled at all these roles and truly shaped history. In this lecture, you'll get to know the person whom the Roman historian Cassius Dio calls "the noblest man of his day." With his quiet competence, pragmatism, civic-mindedness, work ethic, loyalty, and modesty, Agrippa embodied the most admirable qualities of the Romans without the arrogance and cruelty that they also commonly exhibited.



A full-length marble statue of Gaius Octavian, the young man who became Augustus. He is depicted standing, facing slightly to the right but looking forward. His right arm is raised in an adlocutio gesture, as if he is addressing his troops. He wears a highly detailed cuirass (breastplate) with various relief carvings, including a central figure and several smaller scenes. A heavy cloak, the paludamentum, is draped over his left shoulder and around his waist. He is barefoot, which is a sign of divinity in Roman art. At his right foot, a small winged cherub (cupido) is shown holding the hem of his garment. The statue is set against a dark, textured background.

Gaius Octavian

## The Best Friend

Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa was born in 63 BC to a humble family of modest wealth, none of whose members had ever held government office. Around the age of 15, while attending school, he befriended another boy who was a few months younger. This boy was Gaius Octavian, whose immediate family was similarly obscure. However, Octavian's mother was the niece of Julius Caesar, who had just completed his conquest of Gaul and was about to initiate a civil war that would end with him seizing control of the Roman Republic.

As teenagers, Agrippa and Octavian traveled together to Spain to gain military experience with Caesar. After winning the war, Caesar went to Rome while Octavian and Agrippa were sent to Illyria to continue their scholarly and military education. In 44 BC, Caesar was assassinated, and his death created a power vacuum that several groups aspired to fill. Chief among these were Mark Antony, Lepidus, Sextus Pompey, Cassius and Brutus, and the remainder of the Roman senate. When Caesar's will was read, a provision posthumously adopted Octavian as his son, instantly catapulting him to prominence as another potential heir to Caesar's legacy—albeit one who seemed the weakest candidate.

Although only 19, Octavian had the makings of a brilliant politician. He possessed a coldly calculating mind, a flair for manipulating people, and a crafty ability to use propaganda to help himself and harm his enemies. His weaknesses were that he was a bad general and was frequently in poor health. By contrast, Agrippa was pragmatic, blunt, and forthright; had an energetic and robust constitution; and was an outstanding organizer and gifted general.

The two boys complemented one another and seemed to develop a deep and genuine friendship. With his aristocratic connections and political dexterity, Octavian acted as the leader and front man while Agrippa played a supporting role and used his talents to advance Octavian's interests. Interestingly, both lived and dressed modestly yet had a strong desire to gain and wield power.



## The General

In 43 BC, Antony, Lepidus, and Octavian's Second Triumvirate defeated Caesar's assassins and divided up the Roman world. Antony took the eastern Mediterranean, Lepidus got North Africa, and Octavian was left with Gaul and Italy. However, tensions grew among the Triumvirs. When a small war broke out in northern Italy in 42 BC, Agrippa got his first independent military command when he was put in charge of a contingent of Octavian's troops; he was victorious. In 40 BC, he was assigned as urban praetor—the official in charge of various matters in the city of Rome. At 24 years old, he was technically too young to hold this post, but his demonstrable competence and close association with Octavian ensured that no one questioned it.

When Octavian left for Gaul, he delegated responsibility for defending all of Italy to Agrippa. Further evidence of Agrippa's growing stature is that in 39 BC, he was appointed to one of Rome's most prestigious state priesthoods. When Sextus raided several ports on the Italian mainland, Agrippa mustered troops, drove him off, and fortified key points. He also succeeded in suppressing revolts of the Gallic and German tribes for Octavian. In all these, Agrippa seemed content to allow his friend to take much of the official credit.

In 37 BC, in recognition of Agrippa's earlier victory in Gaul, the Senate awarded him the highest honor for a successful Roman general—the right to celebrate a triumph—but he declined to hold it. Despite turning down the triumph, he gained another great honor when he was appointed to the consulship for the next year. He was just 27, again officially many years too young to legally hold the post, but this technicality was conveniently overlooked.

Meanwhile, Sextus became a serious threat in Sicily, and war finally broke out. Octavian wanted to gain the support of Roman soldiers, citizens, and senators and become the next Caesar, so he had to establish himself as a military leader like Julius Caesar and Antony. Thus, Agrippa planned and executed a colossal engineering project known as the Portus Julius, which involved excavating wide canals that connected Lake Avernus and Lake Lucrinus with the sea and creating gigantic breakwaters and moles on the coast. This safe location allowed his ships and men to train to bring their naval proficiency up to the level necessary to take on Sextus's fleet.

Agrippa manufactured larger and sturdier ships to neutralize Sextus's vessels' greater agility and speed. He equipped these ships with the *harpax* to enable his men to board Sextus's ships and fight hand to hand, where Agrippa had the edge. He also took advantage of his ships' heavier build to equip them with towers from which his archers could shower the enemy with arrows. Some of his warships also had a *corvus*—a spiked boarding bridge—that could be dropped onto opposing ships, allowing his marines to board them.

The resulting Battle of Mylae was a hard-fought affair. On August 11, 36 BC, Agrippa won convincingly, although it was officially represented as Octavian's victory, with Agrippa merely acting as his agent. Eventually, Agrippa and Octavian's other generals successfully landed in Sicily and besieged and captured the cities held by Sextus. At the final battle at Naulochus in early September, Agrippa only lost three ships, whereas nearly all of Sextus's vast fleet was sunk, burned, captured, or run aground. As always, Agrippa did not publicly boast of his achievement but allowed Octavian to claim official credit as the commander-in-chief.

## The Engineer

Thanks to this great victory, Octavian established firm control over the western half of the Mediterranean and elevated his status and military power to the level of his main adversary, Antony. Octavian rewarded Agrippa by bestowing the *corona navalis*, or naval crown, which was a golden wreath ornamented with miniature ships' rams that Agrippa could wear on formal state occasions. For the next 2 years, Octavian and Agrippa campaigned together in Illyria and subdued various hostile tribes. Agrippa repeatedly proved himself a master of combat on land and sea and of the military skill of logistics.

Back in Rome in 33 BC, Octavian arranged for Agrippa to be elected aedile—an official in charge of urban public works. Although technically a demotion, as always, Agrippa was ready to sacrifice his status to benefit his friend. He threw himself into this new task with his usual energy, completely renovating and expanding the Aqua Marcia aqueduct that supplied Rome with water but had fallen into disrepair. He also constructed dozens of fountains to distribute water to Rome's grateful citizens. Re-elected aedile for

a second year, he renovated two more aqueducts, the Aqua Appia and Aqua Vetus, and built a new one—the Aqua Julia, named after Octavian's adoptive family.

Agrippa took a hands-on role in all these projects, demonstrating yet again his talent for organization while extending his areas of competence to include engineer, architect, and hydrologist. Outstanding at pragmatic jobs, he also had an eye for aesthetics, and he made his new structures not only useful but beautiful. According to one author,

He built 700 cisterns, 500 fountains, and 130 reservoirs, many of them magnificently adorned, for upon them he erected 300 statues of marble or bronze and 400 marble columns—and all of this was accomplished in the space of a single year!

Furthermore, he did not neglect the issue of wastewater disposal. He descended into the foul, stinking depths of Rome's sewers to inspect their condition firsthand. He traversed the course of the main sewer, the Cloaca Maxima—or Great Drain—in a rowboat, eventually emerging through its outlet into the Tiber River. He paid for all these public works with his own money and then donated them to the Roman state.

At the same time, Octavian gave Agrippa command of all his forces and left it to his friend to devise a strategy for vanquishing Antony, who had allied himself with Queen Cleopatra of Egypt. Agrippa utterly defeated him in the Battle of Actium on September 2, 31 BC. Thus, Octavian created and established his role as Augustus, the first emperor of Rome. During his reign, Rome gained many spectacular new public buildings, but the man responsible for many of them was Agrippa.

## The Next Emperor?

By 23 BC, Augustus was approaching 40 years of age, and his often-sickly constitution made the question of succession an urgent one. Agrippa believed his loyal service had earned him the right to be appointed Augustus's successor. However, Augustus was obsessed with the idea of a blood relative

taking over after his death. Having no son and only one daughter, Julia, he settled on his sister's son, Marcellus, as his heir and cemented the choice by marrying him to Julia. This offended Agrippa, who withdrew to the island of Mytilene. Although he still worked for Augustus by overseeing the eastern provinces, this move amounted to a voluntary exile from the center of power.

In 23 BC, Marcellus fell ill and died. Augustus now had no heir, so he quickly recalled Agrippa from the east and offered him Julia's hand in marriage. The intent was for Agrippa and Julia's children to become Augustus's heirs, thus fulfilling his desire for a blood relative to succeed him. Over the next decade, the marriage produced five children: two girls and three boys.

During this time, Agrippa undertook a series of further assignments on Augustus's behalf; waged winning military campaigns in Gaul, Spain, and along the Rhine frontier; and conducted successful diplomatic missions to various eastern potentates. By this point, Agrippa's military reputation was so formidable that merely the announcement that he had been appointed as general for a campaign was enough to quell a rebellion and make an enemy surrender, as happened with the Pannonians in 13 BC.

In 12 BC, Agrippa fell ill and died. Augustus had him interned in his own family mausoleum, adopted Agrippa's two oldest sons as his own, and designated them as his heirs. Tragically, both died in young adulthood, and the Roman Empire did not pass to a blood relative but to Augustus's stepson, Tiberius.

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# 12



## Turia: A Devoted Wife in Times of Crises

**T**he Roman world experienced a moment of crisis and disruption in 49 BC when Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon and effectively declared war against the Roman Republic. The vicious civil war that ensued over the next 4 years brought widespread death and destruction across the Mediterranean world. At this time of chaos and disturbance to the normal social order, a number of women were forced to take on roles ordinarily filled by men. They displayed remarkable determination and skill and achieved success when everything seemed stacked against them. This lecture explores the story of one such woman: Turia.

## Love and War

Turia's story is known from a funerary option that her husband placed on her tomb. The inscription recounts their relationship in the form of a lengthy speech addressed to her. Over time, the inscription was broken up and the pieces scattered, with chunks reused in later buildings. The surviving bits contain more than a thousand words in Latin, but the names of the woman and her husband are missing. Speculations about the couple's identity abound, but the most plausible one is a man named Quintus Lucretius Vespillo and his wife, Turia, who are mentioned in histories written by the ancient Roman authors Valerius Maximus and Appian.

The inscription begins with a love story. At the outbreak of Caesar's civil war, young Turia and Lucretius were engaged but not yet married. The Roman citizenry was split into two factions: the followers of Caesar and those who favored the republic defended by Pompey the Great. Lucretius was Pompey's supporter, so when Caesar invaded Italy and captured Rome, Lucretius fled overseas and left Turia, and their wedding was postponed indefinitely. However, a greater tragedy was in store for her, as her parents were brutally murdered.

Avenging the death of Turia's parents should have been the job of either Lucretius or her sister's husband, but with their men gone, this duty fell upon Turia and her sister. Despite her youth and gender, Turia assumed the responsibility of ensuring the murderers' punishment. The way the inscription describes this episode implies that she did this via some kind of legal action. A woman instigating a judicial proceeding was highly unusual, but Turia was an unusually dynamic and forceful woman. It speaks to her skill and determination that in the inscription, Lucretius says that even if he had been present, he could not have done more than her to bring the case to a successful conclusion.

Unfortunately, Turia's relief at the resolution of this crisis was short-lived because another appeared almost immediately. People claiming to be relatives contested her father's will and asserted that they were the true heirs rather than her and her sister. This challenge posed a legitimate threat that could



have left them destitute. Again, defending the will should have been the job of Lucretius or her brother-in-law, but with the men absent, Turia once again countered the legal challenge by herself and won.

## Her Husband's Champion

In barely a year, Turia won two impressive triumphs as a woman acting in the sphere of men. She successfully carried out duties that should have been performed by a husband, father, or brother, but she was soon called upon to rescue Lucretius in yet another traditionally male sphere: financial affairs. Lucretius was running short on cash and desperately needed money to support himself while away from Rome. As a woman, Turia's fiscal options were limited, but she found a way to help him by giving him her jewelry. She also sent him slaves, money, and supplies to sustain him in exile.



Moreover, she had to assume one of the most fundamental male identities: defender of the house. At this time, unscrupulous politicians employed gangs of ruffians to terrorize their opponents by physically attacking them and destroying their property. One such gang targeted one of Lucretius's mansions. The inscription describes Turia's response thus: "Bravely you drove them back and defended our house." How a young woman managed to repel the gang is not specified, but most likely, she organized and armed the household servants, slaves, and family friends.

After Caesar defeated Pompey, Lucretius was in grave danger of being put to death, but Turia managed to intercede and obtain a pardon for him. At last, the couple celebrated their long-delayed wedding and became husband and wife. However, on the Ides of March in 44 BC, Caesar was assassinated, and the next year, the Second Triumvirate posted lists of their enemies who could be killed with impunity and their property confiscated, which included Lucretius. The inscription states that Lucretius panicked, but his wife steadied him and devised a scheme to save his life. Valerius Maximus provides the details of her audacious strategy:

When Quintus Lucretius was proscribed by the triumvirs, Turia, his wife, kept him out of harm's way by hiding him in the attic between the ceiling of their bedroom and the roof of the house ... not without great danger to herself. And so loyal was she to him, that while others who had been similarly proscribed wandered about suffering in body and mind in remote countries among enemies, he all the while lay safe in the bosom of his wife.

Over the next year, Turia worked tirelessly to get Lucretius's name removed from the list of the proscribed. She needed the consent of all three Triumvirs. Antony was busy in the east, and Octavian consented because he wanted to display his clemency to win over more supporters. Everything hinged on Lepidus, who was in an unforgiving mood. When Turia publicly petitioned him, she was met not only with rejection but also physical abuse. In the end, her readiness to suffer such abuse won her widespread sympathy and compelled Lepidus to pardon Lucretius.

## Together until the End

Once more, the couple overcame incredible adversity to resume their lives together. Nevertheless, one more trial threatened to destroy their happiness. To the couple's great sorrow, they remained childless. In the Roman world, the inability to produce offspring was always a defect in the woman. Accordingly, Turia felt that she had failed Lucretius and announced that he should divorce her. In a further display of selflessness, she would help him find a suitable new wife, leave her financial assets with him for the benefit of his children, and even help raise them.



Fortunately, Lucretius rose to the occasion and vigorously rejected her offer. The passage of the inscription relating his reaction is the most emotional of the entire text:

I became so enraged that I lost my mind. I was so horrified at your proposal that it was very difficult to retain my composure. ... For you to imagine that you would ever cease to be my wife while I was still alive when you had remained so utterly faithful to me when I was exiled and practically dead. What desire or need for children could be so great that I would break faith with you and trade certainty for uncertainty? Why say any more. You remained with me as my wife. I could never have agreed to your proposal without bringing abject shame upon myself and unhappiness on us both.

So, they stayed together for 41 years—unusually long for the era—until Turia's death from natural causes.

## Not Just Turia

While the sheer number of obstacles that Turia had to overcome is perhaps unique, multiple examples of women who performed similar actions exist. The time of crisis produced by the civil wars of the Late Republic forced many women to take on unaccustomed roles, and like Turia, many of them displayed extreme courage and resourcefulness.

The proscriptions produced several parallel instances of wives hiding their husbands or helping them escape. The wife of a man named Antius concealed him in a rolled-up bag so that he could be put on a ship that carried him to safety. When soldiers showed up at the house of a man named Rheginus intent on killing him, his wife hid him in a sewer, which the soldiers declined to search because of the foul stench. To get him out of the city of Rome, she disguised him as a charcoal seller and accompanied him as he passed through the city gates.

Another man named Acilius was caught by a group of soldiers while attempting to flee Rome. In desperation, he told them to go to his wife and that she would reward them for releasing him. By giving them all her jewelry, she bought his freedom. The wife of another refugee named Lentulus was so determined to join her husband in exile in Sicily that she disguised herself as a slave and endured great hardship during the voyage to reach him.

Probably the most famous victim of the proscriptions was Cicero. He was married to a woman named Terentia, and when he fled abroad, she worked diligently to obtain his pardon. First, she and her daughter, Tullia, adopted the practice of always appearing in public dressed in clothes for mourning—a symbolic act that stirred up sympathy for Cicero's plight. Mirroring Turia's appeal to Lepidus, Tullia publicly knelt before the magistrate and begged for Cicero's recall, provoking pity among the populace on account of her youth. Terentia also circulated among Rome's elites and rallied support on behalf of her husband, and she even sold several blocks of her houses to finance her efforts to procure his return and support him while in exile.

Generally speaking, Rome was a patriarchal society in which women were normally excluded from the male spheres of politics, war, and the law. However, such moments of crisis as the Late Republican civil wars created opportunities—usually by necessity—for women to step out of the shadows and assert themselves. Tullia and these women assumed roles that were normally the exclusive prerogative of men and excelled at them.

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# 13



## Vitruvius and Frontinus: Master Engineers

**T**he Roman legions were a supremely efficient war machine that carved out a vast empire stretching from Britain to Mesopotamia at the bloody point of the sword, but they were also one of the greatest construction forces in history. Roman legionaries probably spent more time digging than fighting, and a corps of talented and practical-minded Roman military engineers planned and supervised thousands of miles of roadways that held the empire together, as well as bridges, aqueducts, and other structures that kept it running. These projects shaped the empire and architectural history. In this lecture, you'll explore the stories of Vitruvius and Frontinus, two of those ancient engineers whose accomplishments can still be seen across the Mediterranean today.



## Vitruvius: Caesar's Military Engineer

The first Roman emperor Augustus, who reigned from 31 BC to AD 14, famously boasted that he “found Rome a city made of bricks but left it made of marble.” Indeed, he ordered the construction of an unprecedented number of magnificent marble public buildings in Rome that transformed the capital city. During his reign, a retired Roman military engineer named Vitruvius wrote a revolutionary work to provide the emperor with a guide to best practices for his architectural projects. Titled *Ten Books on Architecture*, this systematic compendium attempted to summarize the principles of architecture for the first time. It considered aesthetics and functionality and still guides how structures are built today.

In Vitruvius's work, he stated that he served as a military engineer in Julius Caesar's army, where he specialized in artillery. His frequent references to battles in Gaul suggest that he was present in most of Caesar's Gallic campaigns. He also commented that he designed and erected a basilica in the town of Fanum Fortunae in Italy. He seemingly applied his engineering skills to an array of building projects, since later Roman authors cite him as an authority on topics as diverse as techniques for constructing mosaics and the standardization of water pipe diameters.

For his services to Caesar and upon the recommendation of Augustus's sister, Vitruvius was awarded a pension. He probably wrote *Ten Books on Architecture* in the 20s BC when he was in ill health. Despite his physical decline, his mind was still sharp, and he logically outlined what he thought an engineer should know. Each of the 10 books begins with one or more historical anecdotes illustrating key principles, followed by a statement of themes and a methodically presented body of content. For Vitruvius, an architect's duties include designing structures and overseeing their actual construction, thus combining the modern jobs of architect, engineer, and builder.

Vitruvius's account of the necessity of a liberal education for an architect influenced the creation of the first universities and their curricula during the Middle Ages. Renaissance humanists were obsessed with his ideas about proportion. He inspired Bramante's St. Peter's Basilica and influenced Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci, as exemplified by da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*. The Venetian architect Andrea Palladio, whose writings and Palladian

style of architecture embodied Vitruvian principles, in turn greatly influenced neo-classical architectural movements of the 17th and 18th centuries. Later architects have similarly been affected by him and his prescription that any well-designed and made structure should embody the three principles of durability, utility, and beauty.

## Ten Books on Architecture

Book 1 describes the ideal education of an architect and stresses a deep knowledge of architectural theory and principles with plenty of practical experience. According to Vitruvius, an architect should master geometry, history, philosophy, music, medicine, optics, arithmetic, the law, and astronomy and also possess the ability to draw skillfully, natural talent, and the willingness to take instruction. Then, Vitruvius laid out six general principles that should be considered when designing a structure—order, arrangement, eurythmy, symmetry, propriety, and economy—and the principles of urban design. Besides the importance of considering the environment and trying to make structures fit into the natural landscape, he discussed the proper placement of cities with regard to water supply, sanitation, food availability, and transportation. He also described the design and placement of walls, buildings, and streets, always taking into account such issues as the prevailing direction of the winds and exposure to sunlight at different times of day.

Book 2 discusses various building materials, such as brick, stone, wood, sand, lime, and pozzolana—a powder derived from volcanic ash that the Romans used to create mortars and concretes, including one that could harden underwater. Book 3 addresses the topic of symmetry, particularly the notion that all elements of a temple should reflect certain mathematical ratios that he believed were especially beautiful. This naturally leads to the subject of Book 4: the classical orders. Vitruvius summarized the origins and characteristics of the three original Greek orders—Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian—and their deviations, such as the Tuscan order found in some Roman buildings and how to adapt them when building atypical structures.

Books 5 and 6 examine large public buildings and private houses, respectively. Among the civic structures analyzed are forums, basilicas, theaters, colonnades, baths, and harbors. For each, he reviewed important features, proper site placement, and unique construction challenges and concerns. His discussion of houses and domestic architecture considers the environment very specifically. For example, he advised that rooms used for eating dinner during the spring and autumn should face east to get the right amount of heat from the sun, while rooms designated for summer dining should have a northern exposure to avoid excessive heat.

Book 7 addresses the internal surfaces of buildings, including floors, walls, and ceilings. Vitruvius analyzed the appropriate materials to be employed and decorative elements, such as floor mosaics and wall paintings. Focusing on hydrological issues, Book 8 reviews aqueducts, wells, cisterns, pipes, and how to locate good water. Book 9 discusses astronomical subjects, including the moon, constellations, planets, the zodiac, and how to construct sundials. Finally, Book 10 looks at mechanical machines of various types, such as water wheels, water mills, the Archimedean screw for lifting water, pumps, and the water organ. The longest of all the books, it concludes with military machines, particularly artillery—a topic dear to Vitruvius’s heart.



## Frontinus: Curator Aquarum

About a century after Vitruvius, another man who served in the Roman military wrote another hugely influential text on civil engineering. His name was Sextus Julius Frontinus. As a general in the campaigns to suppress uprisings along the Rhine River, he accepted the surrender of 70,000 members of the rebellious Lingones tribe. In AD 73, he was chosen as consul, and then he served as the governor of Britain, where he fought more barbarian tribes and built roads in Wales. From AD 78 to 79, he was the governor of Asia, and in AD 97, he was appointed *curator aquarum*—caretaker of the water supply—for the city of Rome. Finally, he closed out his career with two more stints as consul in AD 98 and 100.

Somehow, Frontinus found the time to write a number of books on various topics, including one on agriculture and a technical study of surveying techniques, neither of which has survived. He wrote a manual on the art of war, which is also lost, except for one of its appendices, a lengthy compendium of military strategies. Finally, drawing on the knowledge and experience he gained while serving as *curator aquarum*, he wrote a technical treatise titled *De aquis urbis Romae* or “On the Waters of the City of Rome,” which describes the system of aqueducts, reservoirs, pipes, and fountains that supplied the capital with its drinking water.

Frontinus’s motivation for compiling his study of Rome’s water system was twofold: to serve as a reference work for him to consult during his administration as *curator aquarum* and to provide future curators with a collection of knowledge to assist them during their tenures. He listed all the aqueducts that supplied water to Rome, enumerated for each one when it was built, by whom, how much it cost, from what source it derived its water, what course it followed from source to city, how long it was, how much of its length was raised on arches, what the carrying capacity of its pipes was, and how its waters were distributed throughout the city.

Other sections of the *De aquis urbis Romae* contain yet more technical discussions on topics such as the diameters and carrying capacities of various types of water pipes. Perhaps more entertaining are the sections in which Frontinus described some of the challenges involved in managing the water supply. One of these was dealing with people who illegally drilled holes into

an aqueduct, attached pipes, and siphoned off water for their personal use. As *curator aquarum*, Frontinus had to organize gangs of workers to constantly patrol the entire course of the aqueducts, removing unlawful taps and repairing leaks.

Other essential maintenance tasks included keeping trees and flora away from the aqueducts and periodically clearing out the hundreds of settling tanks that prevented the conduits from silting up by collecting the sand, soil, and clay carried by the water. Another topic that he treated in detail was the Roman law code that addressed water supply issues and problems.

Although Frontinus's book focuses on the aqueduct system of Rome, it is an invaluable guide to understanding Roman hydraulic engineering across the empire. Many Roman cities had elaborate water systems with impressive scales and technical sophistication; they were also aesthetic accomplishments. A sense of their beauty and practicality can be glimpsed in the segments of Roman aqueducts that still survive today, such as the long arched section found at Aqueduct Park in modern Rome and the soaring vaults of the Roman aqueduct in Segovia, Spain.



Frontinus died in AD 103, a few years after completing his term as curator aquarum and writing his book about Rome's water supply. Both he and Vitruvius wrote highly influential works on architecture and engineering. One is a comprehensive overview of the discipline of architecture from an ideal perspective, while the other is an extremely detailed snapshot of one real set of structures. Each offers unique insights and invaluable information about Roman civilization.

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# 14



## Mousa, Eumachia, and Plancia: Enterprising Women

**A**s you've already seen, ancient authors tend to ignore or underrepresent women, leaving only fragmentary glimpses of their lives. Nevertheless, some stories of women who transcended their expected roles in society and made history in the process can be pieced together. They owned all sorts of businesses, served in public roles and as civic priestesses, and erected monuments and structures at their own expense for the benefit of their communities. Evidence of their existence raises the question of whether scholars have perhaps exhibited some bias by underemphasizing their roles. This lecture describes a few of these dynamic, enterprising, and noteworthy women.

## Mousa: From Slave to Queen

Extending from the shores of the Mediterranean to modern Afghanistan, the Parthian Empire was Rome's neighbor and frequent adversary. In 53 BC, at the Battle of Carrhae, the Parthians obliterated seven entire legions led by Marcus Crassus and captured the golden eagle standard that each legion carried—a potent and revered Roman symbol. When Augustus became emperor a few decades later, he negotiated with Parthia for the return of the lost eagles. To achieve this aim, he bestowed a variety of gifts upon the Parthian king, Phraates IV. During one of these parleys—most likely the one that took place in 23 BC—one of the presents given to Phraates was a young Roman slave girl named Mousa.

Mousa became one of Phraates's concubines and bore him a son, also named Phraates but nicknamed Phraatakes—"little Phraates." Although the king already had several wives and sons, Mousa charmed him so much that he elevated her status from concubine to wife. An ambitious woman, she wanted Phraatakes to be the next king of Parthia, but several other sons stood between him and the throne. When Phraatakes turned 15, around 3 BC, Mousa, either acting alone or in concert with her teenage son, murdered Phraates. Phraatakes ascended to the kingship as Phraates V.

While her son was the nominal ruler, Mousa was the real power behind the throne. Her status is suggested by coins minted during the reign of Phraates V, which show him on one side and her on the other. Indeed, she was the only woman depicted and named on any Parthian coin. Nevertheless, many Parthians disapproved of the previous king's assassination and a woman exercising so much authority. The author Josephus, who is the main source for her story, reports rumors that she and her son had an incestuous relationship, which may or may not have been true. In the ancient world, this insult was leveled against many commanding royal women.

The rule of Mousa and Phraates V lasted 6 years. In AD 4, a revolt deposed them. One ancient source says that Phraates fled to Syria and died there. Unfortunately, no surviving source records Mousa's ultimate fate. While much about her life remains mysterious, what is known constitutes one of the most dramatic rags-to-riches narratives in history.

## Eumachia: Patron of Pompeii

Eumachia lived in the city of Pompeii near Mt. Vesuvius during the early 1st century AD. One reason Romans risked living in the volcano's shadow was that the ash from previous eruptions gifted the region with fertile soil, and Eumachia's wealthy Pompeian family earned its fortune from this source—by owning vineyards, cultivating grapes, and selling wine. The family was also involved in manufacturing two essential products made of clay: bricks and amphorae. In addition, the family of Eumachia's husband had become rich from sheep farming and wool production.

The most obvious way Eumachia left her mark was by erecting a monumental edifice situated along one side of Pompeii's forum in one of the most prominent and desirable locations in the city. It featured elaborate decorations and fine marble statues, including those of the founders of Rome—Aeneas and Romulus—and the goddesses Augustan Concord and Piety, to whom the complex was dedicated. Near the statue of Concord stood a full-length portrait statue of Eumachia with this inscription on its base: "To Eumachia, daughter of Lucius, public priestess, dedicated by the guild of fullers."

This building and its inscriptions reveal much about Eumachia's status and activities. In the Greco-Roman world, wealthy citizens often donated public structures to their hometowns, but the majority were erected by men. One inscription states that the edifice was put up by Eumachia and at her own expense—her husband was not named. The building's large size, fine decorations, and conspicuous location indicate that she must have independently attained considerable wealth, social status, and influence. The inscription on the statue's base declares that she was the patron of one of the most important guilds of the city, which also speaks to her social position and power. Finally, both inscriptions mention that she was a priestess of Venus—a prestigious post that could only have gone to someone of significance.

One final structure commemorates Eumachia's wealth, power, and status: her tomb. Standing in a prominent position just outside one of the main gates of the city, it is the largest surviving tomb in Pompeii and includes a terrace, altars, benches, and a skillfully carved marble relief. Its inscription simply and proudly declares, "Eumachia, daughter of Lucius, [built this] for herself and her household."

## Plancia: *Demiourgos* of Perge

Plancia Magna lived in the city of Perge on what is today the southern coastline of Turkey, where her family was among the wealthiest and most influential. Her father, Marcus Plancius Rutilius Varus, was a Roman senator during the second half of the 1st century AD. His benefactions to Perge earned him the title of “founder of the city”—an honorific meaning that his works substantially transformed the city rather than that he founded it. Moreover, Plancia was married to another wealthy man, who was considerably older than she was.

In the early 2nd century AD, she donated a set of spectacular buildings to the city. The main one was a monumental gateway complex consisting of two round towers, an elaborately decorated triple marble arch, and an enclosed courtyard with a two-story marble colonnade featuring rows of larger-than-life-size statues of gods, civic heroes, and members of her own family. Among the gods portrayed in the bottom row were Aphrodite, Castor, Pollux, and five Olympian deities, while the top row of statues of civic heroes included Plancia’s father, brother, and Plancia herself. The sheer size of this complex, the high quality of materials used, and the many large, custom-made statues would have required a gigantic sum of money.

The associated inscriptions state that Plancia paid for this complex, and her husband and son are not mentioned. The statues of her father and brother have inscriptions that identify their relationships to her rather than their own achievements—a startling omission because both men reached the highest levels of government in the Roman Empire. In



Plancia Magna

the Roman world, such phraseology as “Gaius Plancius Varus, city founder, citizen of Perge, brother of Plancia Magna” was unusual and made a forceful statement about how much power and status Plancia held.

Other inscriptions found in Perge provide information about the roles she played in the town’s social, political, and religious life. They show that she possessed the title of gymnasiarch—director of the town gymnasium—and held several distinguished religious offices, including priestess of Artemis, “the first and only priestess of the Mother of the Gods,” and high priestess of the imperial cult. She was also a *demiourgos* of Perge—a city magistrate who was chosen annually.

As with Eumachia, how Plancia managed to exercise so much autonomy and wield so much wealth and power as a woman is unclear. Scholars have suggested that when her father died, he split his wealth evenly between Plancia and her brother. Perhaps her significantly older husband expired soon after their marriage, leaving her an atypical degree of autonomy and a huge amount of wealth at her disposal. Maybe she simply had an exceptionally forceful personality. Unfortunately, very little is known about her apart from what the inscriptions say.

## Other Notable Women of Pompeii

Eumachia and Plancia Magna are not the only examples of civically active women—an observation that is at odds with the traditional interpretation of the passive and subsidiary roles of women in ancient Rome. In Pompeii, a woman named Corelia Celsa paid for a sanctuary for Isis, while another called Mamia funded a temple for Augustus. The dedicatory inscription for this temple mentions that she erected it with her own funds and on land that she owned. Her generosity earned her a monumental tomb in a prominent space near the city walls, where only the most important citizens were allowed to be buried.

Along with Eumachia, two additional women are named in a Pompeian inscription as patrons and public priestesses of the goddess Ceres. Another, Terentia Paramone, is identified as the donor of a building and as a public priestess of the goddess Demeter Thesmophoria.

Yet another woman of Pompeii, Julia Felix, owned and managed various types of real estate and generated income by renting out her properties. Unlike the other women discussed in this lecture, she was not a member of a wealthy or aristocratic family. She was from the lower classes, and one inscription that mentions her suggests that she was an illegitimate daughter—perhaps of a freed slave. Representing a very different stratum of society, she made no grand donations to the city and received no honorific statues. Nevertheless, she was a successful businesswoman and likely attained a comfortable level of wealth.

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# 15



## Pliny the Elder: 20,000 Things Worth Knowing

**P**eople often like to boast about how hard they work, but in this lecture, you'll meet a real workaholic: Pliny the Elder. He was a high-ranking Roman administrator who spent almost all his time working, studying, and writing. His greatest achievement was the *Natural History*—a massive thing that is divided into 37 books, runs to 400,000 words, and tackles everything about nature, including the cosmos, world geography, all living creatures, and rocks and minerals. Written in the 1st century AD, it is the forerunner of all later encyclopedias, from the *Encyclopedia Britannica* in 1768 and Diderot's encyclopedia to World Book and today's online Wikipedia.

## Pliny the Elder's Background

Pliny the Elder was born in the northern Italian town of Comum in AD 23 or 24. He was from a wealthy equestrian family and received an excellent education. As a young man, he served as an officer in the Roman army. In one of his three postings on the German frontier, he commanded a contingent of cavalry. Shifting to government service, he was a procurator—an official in charge of financial affairs—in a number of regions of the empire. Eventually, he ended up on the Bay of Naples as the commander of the Roman naval base at Misenum. In addition to all these military and administrative activities, he somehow found time to act as the equivalent of a lawyer in the Roman law courts.

Pliny was also an extraordinarily prolific author. His first book, inspired by his experience as a cavalry commander in Germany, is titled *On the Use of Javelins by Cavalry*. He then wrote a biography of his patron, Pomponius Secundus, and a multivolume history called *History of the German Wars*. During the reign of the mentally unbalanced emperor Nero—when commenting on anything even remotely related to politics could be dangerous—he wisely turned to blander topics, writing a lengthy guide to rhetorical training titled *The Student* and an even longer technical work on thorny grammatical problems called *Questionable Phrases*.

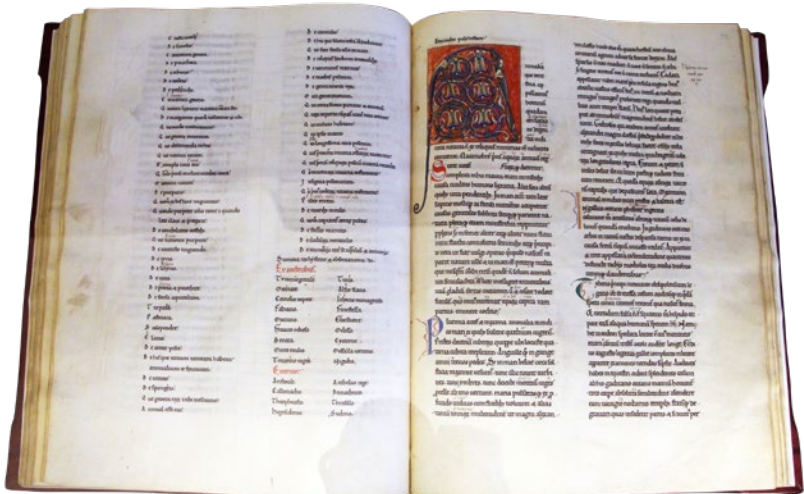
Finally, Pliny authored the text that would ensure his fame—the colossal *Natural History*. He proudly announced that “by scrutinizing approximately 2,000 different books written by one hundred [previous] authors ... I have collected here 20,000 things that are worth knowing.” Although he asserted that he was the first author to attempt such a comprehensive feat, he did not claim to produce new knowledge. Instead, he gathered and organized important practical knowledge contained in earlier works. Furthermore, he stressed that he did not aspire to literary eloquence or to please or entertain the reader. For him, the purpose of the *Natural History* was utilitarian.

Some later readers have criticized Pliny because he sometimes cited information that seemed mythical or unbelievable. He argued that he deliberately chose comprehensiveness over absolute veracity. He admitted that some of the things he repeated were almost certainly not true but defended their inclusion by saying that since other authors put them on record, he

could not omit them. In such cases, however, he was careful to express his skepticism. In the end, he declared, “Even if I do not fully succeed [in this project] it is honorable and glorious to the fullest degree to have made the attempt.”

## The First Encyclopedia

The entirety of Book 1 of the *Natural History* consists of arguably the greatest table of contents ever written, which fills 71 full, single-spaced pages in the standard translation. For each of the subsequent 36 books, it names every topic addressed and provides a list of all the authorities that Pliny consulted. He also added up all the tidbits of information present in each book and listed these numerical totals. Book 6, for instance, which surveys several geographic regions, is described as containing accounts of “1,195 towns; 576 groups of peoples; 115 famous rivers; 38 famous mountains; 108 islands; 95 extinct towns and peoples; and 2,214 other facts, investigations, and observations.”



Pliny's love of organization is evident throughout the work. In general, he liked to start with large or important things and progress to smaller ones. Thus, Book 2 opens with cosmology, the nature of god and the universe, the heavens, astronomy, and meteorology. Books 3 to 6 progress to world geography, and Book 7 is devoted to an account of the different tribes and ethnicities of human beings. This is followed by Books 8 and 9 on land and aquatic animals, respectively. Book 10 covers birds, and Book 11 tackles insects, with a section expounding on comparative anatomy.

A detailed account of plants occupies Books 12 to 19. Next, Books 20 to 27 are composed of a lengthy analysis of medicines that can be made from plants, and Books 28 to 32 recount medicines that can be fashioned from animals and animal parts. Books 33 to 36 look at inanimate natural resources, such as rocks and minerals. Finally, Book 37 concludes with a survey of gems.

Although the *Natural History* is notionally about nature, it is really about human beings' relationship with nature. This human-centric approach is perhaps best exemplified by the fact that one-third of the *Natural History* is dedicated to the topic of medicine. Moreover, Pliny constantly marveled at the strange and amazing things found in nature. This makes the *Natural History* seem like a motley grab-bag of random factoids at times. Everything fascinated Pliny, and he could not resist including all the information he accumulated—whether important or trivial.

To illustrate, here are a few chosen at random: The skin of a hedgehog is useful in leatherworking, Rome's trade deficit with India amounts to 50 million sesterces a year, and the big toe of King Pyrrhus's right foot can cure diseases of the spleen. Pliny also included *mirabilia* or "wonders," such as a tribe called the Sciapodae, who possess only one leg that ends in a gigantic foot and who habitually lie on their backs, shading themselves beneath their single foot. While expressing skepticism about such stories, he noted that "the more I observe nature, the less likely I am to consider any statement about her to be completely impossible."

## Technology versus the Environment

While most of the *Natural History* consists of a bare recitation of facts, Pliny occasionally made moralizing comments. He consistently denounced luxury goods and the desire for them as degenerate vices. For example, Book 33 contains an extended technical narrative on Roman mining practice but is prefaced with the lament that humans are too covetous of precious metals, such as gold. Additionally, he critiqued the destructive and intrusive methods of mining as offensive to nature.

Even when discussing baser metals such as iron, Pliny inserted some moralizing observations about the ill uses that humans make of nature's bounty:

Iron is both the best and the worst tool, inasmuch as with it we plough the ground, plant trees, trim trees ... build houses and quarry rocks ... but we also use it for wars, slaughter, and brigandage. Not only do we employ iron in hand-to-hand encounters, but as a winged missile projected from catapults or hurled by the arm ... which I deem the most criminal construct of man's genius, for it enables death to reach human beings more quickly as if we have taught iron to fly, and have given it wings.

Nevertheless, Pliny listed 136 great inventions of mankind, including fire, the domestication of farm animals, and the cultivation of grain. Among the greatest human technological innovations he cited were writing, pottery, weaving, bronze- and ironworking, glass, and paper. In the social realm, he offered the development of trade, treaties, kingship, law courts, and popular government. Interestingly, he attributed the creation of slavery to the Spartans, who were also credited with martial inventions, such as helmets and swords.

Pliny's list also contains some eccentric items, such as the craft of divining the future from birds and the practice of daily shaving. The scattershot and erratic nature of his curiosity is perhaps exemplified by the fact that the length and

emphasis he devoted to the invention of the water wheel—a device that had the potential to revolutionize the economy—were far less than his enthusiasm for a method for fattening snails.

## Pliny's Death and Legacy

As for his credentials as a workaholic, Pliny believed that sleep was a complete waste of time that could be better spent working. Therefore, he would only sleep a few hours each night, going to bed early and rising around midnight. After fulfilling his duties as a government administrator, he spent the rest of his time on scholarly pursuits. His relentless work ethic was matched by an insatiable curiosity, but unfortunately, this curiosity may have contributed to his death. When Mt. Vesuvius erupted in AD 79, he promptly embarked on a boat to get a closer look at the unusual natural phenomenon. He ended up being overcome by the ash and fumes from the volcano and suffocated.

The legacy of the *Natural History* is immense. It was regarded as a standard reference from antiquity through the early modern period. Due to its popularity, more than 200 copies are extant, whereas many ancient texts survive in only a single manuscript. When Gutenberg invented the printing press around AD 1450, it was one of the first books to be printed. By AD 1500, no fewer than 39 different editions had appeared despite the high cost of printing.

The *Natural History* also directly inspired the great Enlightenment-era works that attempted to lay out a global taxonomy cataloging the natural world, such as those by Buffon and Linnaeus. Even Pliny's hodgepodge approach to assembling factoids and *mirabilia* about nature had a later Enlightenment counterpart in the popular collections of remarkable objects and creatures known as cabinets of curiosity or wonder rooms. Finally, although the *Natural History* is sometimes interpreted as an expression of Roman domination over nature and a parable about Roman imperialism, it is widely considered as the earliest surviving encyclopedia.



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# 16



## Quintilian: The Eloquent Professor

**I**n ancient Rome, having oratorical skill was a surefire route to success. For the ruling elite, life was all about public competition and revolved around a never-ending series of public spectacles, rituals, and performances. Speechmaking played a central role at all these events, so rhetoric—the formal study of effective persuasion in speech and writing—was a popular subject of study. Teachers of rhetoric were highly regarded, and at least half a dozen manuals written by ancient Roman rhetoricians still survive today. This lecture discusses the era's longest, most detailed, and most comprehensive oratorical handbook. It was written by Marcus Fabius Quintilianus—often referred to simply as Quintilian—and is titled the *Institutio oratoria* or the *Institutes of Oratory*.

## Quintilian's Career

Quintilian was born into a wealthy provincial family in Calagurris, Spain, during the late 30s AD. He received a solid basic education and was sent to Rome, probably in his teens, to finish his schooling. As he displayed a talent for rhetoric, he became an apprentice to Domitius Afer, famed as one of the best orators of his day who had written a book on the subject. When Afer died in 59 AD, Quintilian returned home to Spain, where a man named Galba was appointed governor. Quintilian likely served on Galba's staff, and when Galba was acclaimed as the emperor, he took Quintilian along with him when he assumed the throne in Rome.

The next year, Galba was assassinated, but Quintilian was already established among Rome's elite circles. He opened a school dedicated to teaching rhetoric and managed to wrangle an annual salary from the state. The new emperor, Vespasian, needed a well-educated cadre of elites to staff his administration, so he established a number of subsidies for teachers of Greek, Latin, and rhetoric. Wealthy Romans had traditionally hired tutors for their children's education, and for the first time, the government took a role in the process.



Galba

In addition to running his school, Quintilian gave declamations in the law courts and turned his attention to writing. His first book, titled *On the Causes of the Decline of Eloquence*, laments the supposed decline of Roman culture—a popular theme among Roman authors. After serving as the ancient equivalent of a professor of rhetoric and overseeing his academy for 20 years, he retired from teaching and quit his career as a speaker in legal disputes.

Quintilian was in his early fifties when he retired around AD 90. With his newfound leisure, he resolved to write a grand work describing the ideal education and training for an orator and outlining the principles of the art of rhetoric. The result, the *Institutio oratoria*, took several years to write. While authoring it, he was struck by a sequence of terrible personal misfortunes: He lost his beloved wife and then his two young sons to disease. Nevertheless, he persevered and finished it. The exact date of his death is uncertain, but from references by other authors, it occurred within the same decade.

## The Philosophy of *Institutio Oratoria*

The *Institutio oratoria* is a massive text divided into 12 volumes.

Books 1 and 2 lay out an ideal program of education for prospective orators. Books 3 through 7 are concerned with invention, meaning the process of composing a speech, including different types of oration and the content and rhetorical techniques appropriate to each. Books 8 through 11 describe elocution, which covers issues of oratorical style and practical aspects of memorization and delivery. The final book, 12, focuses on the orator's moral qualities and career.

Book 1 proclaims, “My aim, therefore, is the education of the perfect orator.” In this way, Quintilian began with the earliest stages of education for young children and moved through each subsequent level, delineating which topics and methods are best to use at each. He contended that the best orators result from the combination of three factors: nature, meaning that an orator must possess at least a basic level of innate talent; study, the process of carefully and assiduously following the program of education given in his text; and practice, the experience of repeatedly composing and delivering speeches.

Quintilian's theory of education includes the concept that children are natural learners and that if a child fails to master his lessons, the fault is in poor teaching rather than the child. All those who are close to a young child become strong influences, and parents, nurses, and even household slaves play significant roles in the child's development. The child's first teacher is the *paedagogus*, who usually lives within the home and offers instruction in basic grammar and literacy while also acting as a general supervisor and guardian for the child. Unusually, Quintilian took a strong stand against physical punishment, denouncing it as injurious not only to the body but also to the character.

Overall, Quintilian's concept of primary education seems enlightened and humane in its approach. He urged teachers to recognize the individuality of their pupils and adjust their lessons to take into account a particular student's strengths, weaknesses, temperament, and learning style. He suggested that games and play can be useful tools for exciting a student's imagination and developing their character. He noted that in addition to grammar and rhetoric, a complete basic education should also cover subjects such as arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, logic, and music—the set of disciplines that would later form the basis of the traditional liberal arts.

Meanwhile, the first half of Book 2 focuses on the next stage of education in early adolescence and the qualities of the ideal teacher. Quintilian asserted that students learn the most when they regard their teachers with love and respect and that this outcome is what teachers should strive for. The second half of Book 2 shifts to a general discussion of theories of rhetoric, including a historical survey of earlier ideas. Quintilian proposed a pragmatic and flexible attitude toward the art of public speaking and—in contrast to previous authors' often complex and doctrinaire definitions—his own modest and straightforward definition for the term *rhetoric*: “the science of speaking well.”

## How to Be a Good Public Speaker

Books 3 through 6 list the three main types of speeches that orators are called upon to give: laudatory, deliberative, and judicial. The last kind is sometimes called forensic oratory, and it gets the most elaborate treatment—not surprising given its importance in making or breaking a young, ambitious



Roman's career. Cicero, for example, owed his rise to the fame he gained as an advocate in Rome's courts. Indeed, Cicero was Quintilian's ideal orator, and the *Institutio oratoria* can be viewed as making the argument that Cicero's style represented the peak of Roman rhetoric.



Books 4, 5, and 6 feature in-depth descriptions of the various parts of a standard speech and advice regarding how each should be written. The first is the *exordium* or introduction, which presents the basic thesis, followed by the *narratio* or narration, which states the facts of the case. The third and often longest section is the *probatio*, which presents proofs and evidence to back up the argument and may include the testimony of witnesses. Next is the *refutatio* or refutation of opposing arguments. Finally, the oration concludes with the *peroratio*—a recapitulation of the main argument and an appeal to the listeners' emotions. Book 6 also discusses the use of humor to divert an audience's attention from inconvenient facts, deflect an opponent's attacks, win the goodwill of a jury, and keep listeners awake and engaged during a long speech.



Books 8 through 11 turn to style and how to present information. Emphasizing grammatical correctness and clarity, they explore word choice and language. Quintilian also addressed the topic of memory, as ancient speeches could sometimes be several hours long, and orators were expected to deliver them from memory without consulting a text. Furthermore, he stressed that merely composing a brilliant speech is not enough; to be effective, it must be delivered compellingly. Delivery encompasses several crucial components, such as voice tone, the ability to project the voice properly, gestures, and body language.

Having laid out the stages of preparation necessary to become a great orator, Quintilian devoted Book 12 to aspects of a public speaker's career, including the advice to retire once age and infirmity render one's delivery ineffective. He restated his ideas about what makes an ideal orator, with an emphasis on moral qualities, asserting that "above all he must be a good man." The reason he said this is that oratory is a powerful tool that can be dangerous if used by unscrupulous individuals.

Quintilian concluded his work with an earnest declaration of the value of rhetoric:

Let us seek with all our hearts the true majesty that is oratory, the greatest gift of the gods to man, without which all are mute, and are robbed both of present glory and the immortal fame of posterity.

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# 17



## Galen the Physician: Medical Pioneer

**T**his lecture presents Galen, whose writings constituted the greatest influence on medicine for the next 1,600 years and served as a handbook for physicians until the 19th century. He was a favorite of medieval Arabic doctors and was regarded as a noble sage by Renaissance scholars. He traveled widely to all corners of the Roman world, actively practiced medicine for more than 50 years, and treated gladiators and emperors. A relentless self-promoter, he was combative and vain, but his emphasis on anatomical knowledge, use of case studies, careful observation of symptoms, and practical experience laid the groundwork for the discipline of medicine as it is still practiced today.

## Galen's Background

Galen was born in AD 129 in the city of Pergamon, located on the western coast of modern Turkey. It was one of the intellectual centers of the ancient world, whose library boasted a collection of texts exceeded only by the Library of Alexandria. It also had a famous temple of the god of healing, Asclepius, and those suffering from illnesses traveled great distances to seek a cure there.

In cultural terms, Galen thought of himself as a Greek and was extremely proud of being an heir to the Greek intellectual and philosophical heritage. Both Galen's grandfather and father were architects, and this profession brought the family wealth and respect. Galen unabashedly hero-worshipped his father, Nicon, describing him admiringly as "one who had mastered geometry, architecture, logic, mathematics, and astronomy. All who knew him praised his justice, goodness, and moderation, above even philosophers."

Nicon personally supervised Galen's education and taught him geometry, mathematics, grammar, and logic. When Galen reached the age of 14, Nicon took the unusual step of arranging for him to receive instruction from a group of philosophers, each representing one of the major contemporary philosophical schools. Thus, he was tutored by a Platonist, a Stoic, a Peripatetic, and an Epicurean. This eclectic experience left him with an inclination toward adopting a broad intellectual perspective.

When Galen was 16, Nicon had a series of dreams that caused him to shift his son's career focus from philosophy to medicine. Accordingly, Galen began to study with the most renowned local physicians, and he eagerly embraced his training with a zeal bordering on obsession. As with philosophy, rather than apprenticing himself to just one physician, Galen studied with many. Some of them specialized in certain types of ailments, such as Aeschrion the Empiric, who was renowned for his remedy for rabies.

In AD 148, when Galen was 19, his father died. Soon afterward, he left Pergamon to continue his studies at Smyrna, another important city in Asia Minor. Much of his education consisted of hands-on experience from accompanying his teachers on their rounds as they saw and treated patients and mixed and administered medicines. He dissected animals and observed

human patients and their anatomy when presented with the opportunity. One of his earliest publications was titled *On the Motion of the Chest and Lungs* and was based on such firsthand observations.

## The Gladiators' Doctor

Galen's quest to master medical knowledge took him to Corinth and then to Alexandria. After familiarizing himself with the state of contemporary medical knowledge, he returned to Pergamon in AD 157 at the age of 28. Despite his youth, he was appointed as the physician of the city's gladiators. One reason he gained this prestigious position was that he staged a dramatic if gruesome public demonstration of his medical skills. He took a live monkey, sliced open its belly, and pulled out its intestines. He then made a show of replacing the animal's intestines and sewing up the wound. He also deliberately severed some of its large arteries and deftly sealed them up.

Galen's work as the gladiators' doctor gave him extensive experience in treating severe cuts. For example, he stitched up slashes to the muscles and tendons of the upper thigh, where gladiators were prone to being hit. Hands and feet were also frequent targets, and he even successfully repaired a few cases of deep, penetrating abdominal wounds, which usually proved fatal due to infection. Galen claimed that under his expert care, Pergamon's gladiators suffered fewer fatalities than they had with previous doctors. The appointment was an annual one, and he was selected for it for 5 consecutive years.

At the end of his final term in AD 161, Galen moved to Rome. He quickly established himself as an up-and-coming doctor by curing Eudemus, a well-known philosopher in the city. Galen also ingratiated himself with a powerful senator, Flavius Boethus, who introduced him into the circles of high society, ultimately including the emperor. Galen's confidence, which often bordered on arrogance, and his public disdain for the abilities of rival physicians unsurprisingly earned him enemies, especially among the doctors that he derided.

Galen performed public vivisections of animals along the lines of his earlier stunt with the monkey. He chopped open live pigs, goats, cows, and monkeys and then manipulated their nerves and muscles to produce effects that astonished his audience. He also dissected a wide variety of animals, including mammals, snakes, fish, and birds. Some of the more exotic creatures to go under his knife were several ostriches and even an elephant. As grisly as these experiments were, they provided him with a great deal of practical knowledge about internal organs and the circulatory and nervous systems, which informed his writings and medical practice. Thus, his books correctly identified previously unknown networks of nerves, and his patients benefited from his understanding of muscles, tendons, and organs.

For example, he once operated on a slave boy with an infection of the sternum. He removed the diseased bone as well as the infected tissue beneath it so that the boy's beating heart was visible to the fascinated crowd watching the procedure. Miraculously, the boy survived the operation and lived for many years afterward. Galen also cured the wife of his patron, Boethus—a feat for which the grateful senator gave Galen the enormous sum of 400 gold pieces as a reward.

## Meeting Marcus Aurelius

Galen returned to his hometown of Pergamon for a couple of years, but in AD 168, Emperor Marcus Aurelius summoned him. At this moment, the Roman Empire was struck by a plague that resulted in the deaths of millions of people. Which disease this was is uncertain, but Galen described treating its victims. When Aurelius marched off to battle, he assigned Galen as a physician for his son and heir, Commodus—a duty that he fulfilled for the next 7 years. During this period, he wrote prolifically. Among the dozens of treatises he authored was *On Healthiness*, which contains modern-sounding advice about how to lead a healthy life, including the benefits of exercising regularly and eating a well-balanced, moderate diet.

During a visit to Rome, Aurelius fell ill, and his regular physicians diagnosed him as suffering from a serious illness. However, Galen correctly proclaimed that the emperor merely had indigestion. He was also enlisted to provide Aurelius with a medicine called theriac. A mysterious drug taken by most of

the Roman emperors, theriac was believed to cure and prevent a variety of diseases and ailments. Galen's version of this ancient wonder drug contained no fewer than 64 ingredients, including cinnamon from India and the flesh of a viper.

Galen had now reached the top of his profession. Even while on retainer to the imperial family, he continued to see other patients and to write medical and philosophical treatises. When Aurelius died in AD 180, Commodus took the throne. While the father—famously an adherent of the Stoic school of philosophy—had been a wise and sober emperor, the son became known as one of Rome's "bad emperors," prone to erratic and despotic behavior. Nevertheless, Galen continued in his role as one of the imperial physicians.

## Later Life and Legacy

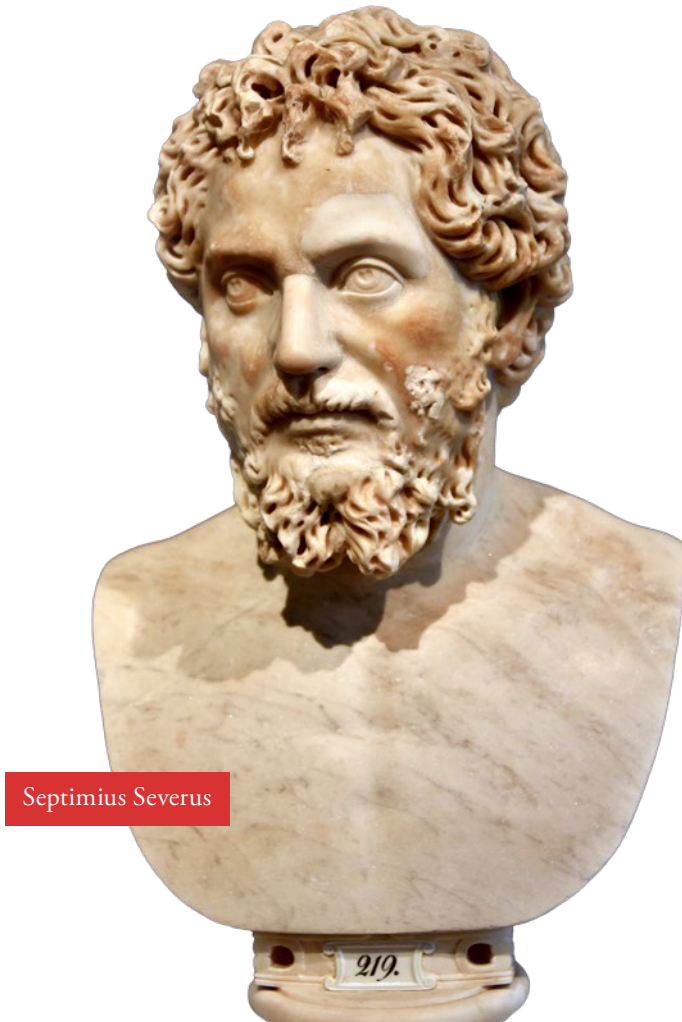
In AD 192, a disaster in Rome had profound personal consequences for Galen. As he recounted,

Another great burden has been laid upon me. For when I had nearly completed my work *On Anatomical Procedures*, it happened that a great fire broke out in which the Temple of Peace was burnt down, together with many warehouses and storehouses ... in which were stored my books on anatomical dissections along with all my other writings. None of my works survived except what I had already given to the copyists for transcription.

While many of his already published works survived via copies elsewhere, a large number that existed only as single manuscripts were lost. The pharmacological side of his practice was particularly hard-hit. The huge stash of recipes for medicines that he had painstakingly accumulated over his lifetime went up in flames. In addition, his entire stockpile of medicines and the raw ingredients to make them were destroyed. Among the irreplaceable losses were 80 pounds of theriac and his hoard of rare cinnamon.



Galen served as a physician to at least one more emperor, Septimius Severus, who ruled from AD 193 to 211. The date of Galen's death is uncertain, with one tradition claiming that he died at age 70 around AD 200, while another has him living until the age of 87 and expiring around AD 216.



Although Galen's works are no longer valid as medical textbooks, many of the core precepts that he promoted continue to be integral to the practice of medicine, such as his emphasis on a thorough knowledge of anatomy and physiology for any physician. Many of his anatomical discoveries, particularly concerning circulation and nerves, were accurate. He advocated the careful observation of a patient's symptoms, including their progression over time, which endures as an essential component in treating patients. He was sensitive to the nuances of how patients described their symptoms and stressed that doctors need to ask questions and listen attentively to what their patients say in response. He typically structured his experiences with patients as case studies—an influential and useful format to describe medical care. Finally, his advice regarding the importance of nutrition and exercise to a person's overall health and well-being is both prescient and timeless.

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# 18



## Eunus and Bulla: Rebels and Outlaws

**E**unus was a Roman slave who cast off his bonds and became an inspirational leader of a massive revolt against Rome. He managed to wrest control of Sicily and even declared himself king. More than just a threat to travelers, Bulla was a “social bandit” who challenged Roman authority. Although he was an outlaw, he followed a rough moral code and showed sympathy toward the poor and downtrodden. Whether Eunus and Bulla were motivated purely by greed and personal power or had some altruistic motives, their stories in this lecture reveal interesting insights into the tensions within Roman society.

## Eunus the Magician

Eunus's rebellion, known as the First Sicilian Slave War, was the inspiration for the better-known slave revolt led by Spartacus 60 years later. The island of Sicily was Rome's first province, and it was a vital component of the Roman economy. Hundreds of thousands of prisoners from Rome's wars were enslaved and forced to labor on the island's plantations. In the town of Enna in the center of Sicily, one of these unfortunate slaves was Eunus, a captured Syrian who worked as a household servant. Eunus was almost certainly not his true name but the name imposed on him by his master.

According to the Roman author Diodorus Siculus, "Eunus was something of a magician and a wonder-worker. He claimed that he could foretell the future by means of revelations that the gods sent to him while he was asleep." Eunus said that the Syrian deity Atargatis had appeared to him and promised that he would become a king. He made this announcement not only to his fellow slaves but also to his master, Antigenes. Antigenes was amused by this and habitually paraded Eunus before his guests at banquets and asked him questions about his alleged forthcoming reign.

The landowner Damophilos and his wife Megallis were among these guests. They were exceptionally cruel to their slaves—even by Roman standards of the time. In desperation, the couple's abused slaves plotted to kill them and asked Eunus to consult with the gods to confirm that their rebellion would be successful. Eunus proclaimed that the gods granted their full approval. At once, 400 slaves armed themselves with improvised weapons, and with Eunus goading them on with further divinations, they rampaged through Enna, slaughtering their masters and their families.

The other slaves of the town joined in so that it became a general uprising, and they seized control of Enna. Two slaves who had been particular victims of the pair's brutality axe-murdered Damophilos and threw Megallis off a cliff. The slaves then chose Eunus as their leader, and he fulfilled his prophecy by crowning himself king. Within 3 days, he had an improvised army of 6,000 men with which he began ravaging the countryside, attacking villas, freeing slaves, and killing their masters.



## The King of Sicily

At this point, Eunus shed his slave name and adopted a new one—Antiochus. He minted a series of coins bearing this name and an image of the goddess Demeter, who was often viewed as a Greek version of Atargatis. By adopting this Hellenistic name and minting coins, Eunus and his followers declared that they did not want to be viewed as rebellious slaves but rather to be recognized as a legitimate and independent kingdom.



Meanwhile, another slave, Cleon, had initiated a parallel revolution in southern Sicily and joined forces with Eunus. The Romans mobilized against the insurrection, with the praetor Lucius Hypsaeus leading 8,000 professional soldiers stationed in Sicily against the combined slave army, which had grown to about 20,000. In the ensuing battle, the rebels decisively defeated the Romans. In rapid succession, they trounced several more Roman armies and captured other major Sicilian cities. Eunus now controlled about half of the island, and the ranks of his followers swelled to 200,000.

In 134, 133, and 132 BC, the Romans dispatched large armies to attempt to crush the uprising. Each of these armies was commanded by one of the two annually elected consuls for that year. As the consulship was the highest elected office in the Roman government, this indicated the seriousness of the threat. Not only was Sicily economically important, but the creation of a kingdom of ex-slaves was also a direct challenge to Rome's authority that could not be tolerated.

Initially, the rebel armies successfully resisted the Roman assaults and won a few more victories, but eventually, in 132 BC, the power and experience of Rome's legions enabled them to gain the upper hand. They besieged and captured the coastal cities one by one and pushed the insurgents back to their starting point of Enna. Cleon was killed leading a sortie from Enna, and Eunus escaped with 1,000 bodyguards. Ultimately, the Romans trapped him in a cave and captured him. Imprisoned in the town of Morgantina, he died shortly after.

## **Bulla the Social Bandit**

The roads and seas holding the Roman Empire together were perennially infested by gangs that preyed on travelers and merchants. So widespread and frequent were these attacks that a Roman legal text listing common causes of death cites old age, sickness, and bandits. In some instances, however, bandits also constituted a challenge to the state. One such example was Bulla, who terrified the countryside for more than 2 years during the early 3rd century AD. He assembled a large gang of 600 men who raided towns and waylaid and robbed travelers.





Bulla seemed to possess a preternatural ability to evade all efforts by the Romans to capture him. The Roman historian and senator Cassius Dio ascribes this slipperiness to a kind of bandit intelligence network set up by Bulla that kept him informed of all Roman movements. He also supposedly used bribery to gain information. Likely because of his elusiveness, he acquired the nickname Felix, which means “lucky” in Latin.

One of the most interesting aspects of Bulla’s career is that although he was an outlaw, he did not seem to be excessively ruthless. Allegedly, he did not mistreat most of the people he robbed, nor did he steal all of their possessions and money. In one instance, he sent a captured soldier back to the Romans with instructions that he “carry this message to your masters: Feed your slaves properly, so that they will not be forced to become bandits.” This criminal accused the government and social elite of behaving in an inhumane manner. Furthermore, he suggested that their mistreatment of their slaves created bandits like him in the first place.

Therefore, Bulla seemed to fall into a category of bandit that historian Eric Hobsbawm labels “social bandits”:

peasant outlaws whom the ... state regard[s] as criminals, but who remain within peasant society, and are considered by their people as heroes, as champions, avengers, fighters for justice ... to be admired, helped, and supported.

## The Impersonator

The Roman historian Brent Shaw emphasizes several incidents in Bulla's career that provide insights into the nature of authority and power dynamics in the Roman empire. For example, when two of Bulla's men were arrested and condemned to be devoured by wild beasts, Bulla dressed up as a Roman magistrate and boldly went to where they were held. He demanded that they be released into his custody, and overawed by his aura of authority, the guards meekly did so, thus saving their lives.

Bulla once again wore the attire of a high-ranking Roman magistrate when he trapped a Roman centurion tasked with capturing him. He positioned himself on a tribunal—the platform that Roman judges sat on when presiding over a trial—and ordered the centurion's head to be shaven, an indignity sometimes inflicted on slaves. Both these incidents challenged notions of who wielded legitimate power in the Roman world. Apparently, merely looking like a magistrate and adopting an imperious attitude was enough to give a person authority.

Emperor Septimius Severus, who had recently emerged as the victor in a civil war and therefore needed to assert his legitimacy, ultimately felt so challenged by Bulla that he assigned a military tribune—a rank equivalent to the general of an entire legion—along with an elite force of cavalry the task of capturing Bulla. In AD 205, the tribune succeeded through treachery. After learning that Bulla was having an affair with a married woman, the tribune enlisted the cuckolded husband to coerce his wife into betraying Bulla. Bulla's luck finally ran out, and he was seized while asleep in a cave.

Bulla was condemned to be thrown to wild beasts, and his gang of 600 bandits broke up after his death. Nevertheless, he was not the only outlaw who embodied aspects of the social bandit. A few decades earlier in Gaul, a Roman soldier named Maternus deserted from his legion and became the leader of a company of bandits. He attracted followers by promising to divide up the loot into equal shares, and he frequently raided jails and released all the prisoners. The fact that these legends are perennially popular throughout history indicates that human beings, especially those who are impoverished or oppressed, will always yearn for such figures as symbols of hope and freedom.

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# 19



## Ardashir and Shapur: Stupendous Sassanians

**A**mong the greatest enemies of the Roman Empire—such as Cleopatra of Egypt, Vercingetorix of Gaul, Spartacus the rebel gladiator, Boudicca of the Iceni, Jugurtha of North Africa, Arminius the German, and Hannibal of Carthage—only Ardashir I and his son Shapur I of the Sassanian Empire were never beaten. Indeed, Shapur can additionally boast of overcoming four Roman emperors—even killing one and capturing another. Ardashir and Shapur deserve credit not only as some of the most intractable and successful enemies of Rome but also as the founders of one of the great, long-lasting empires of antiquity. Despite these extraordinary accomplishments, they are probably the least known of Rome's notable foes.

## The Son of Sasanus

The mighty Achaemenid Persian Empire was renowned for fighting the Greeks during the 5th century BC. Alexander the Great conquered this vast realm during the 4th century BC, but immediately upon his death, it shattered into dozens of individual kingdoms. A tribe called the Parni seized control of the heart of the old Persian dominions and founded the Parthian Empire, which engaged in a struggle with the Roman Empire over the next 3 centuries.

In the early 3rd century AD, a man named Pabag was a priest at a temple dedicated to the goddess Anahid. When a passing soldier named Sasanus lodged for a night at Pabag's house, the priest had a series of dreams that he interpreted to mean that Sasanus's child would attain fame and fortune. Pabag encouraged the soldier to sleep with his wife and then raised the resulting child, Ardashir, as his own. The name Sassanians is supposedly derived from the soldier Sasanus. Other variants of the tale depict Sasanus as a lowly shepherd who worked for Pabag or as Pabag's father.

Whatever the truth of Ardashir's ancestry, Pabag became the local ruler of a section of the Parthian Empire by overthrowing the previous official. Ardashir succeeded his father and controlled most of the region of Pars, located in today's south-central Iran. He gradually expanded his power into neighboring areas, reaching as far as the Persian Gulf to the south. He also strengthened his position by forming an alliance with the Medes, who occupied the highland regions in northwest Iran, and he began styling himself as the king of Persia.

Meanwhile, Artabanus IV emerged as the king of Parthia. In early AD 220, he turned his attention to combating Ardashir's rebellion. After several preliminary military engagements, the conflict between Ardashir and Artabanus reached a climax with the Battle of Hormozdgan in April of AD 224. By this point, Ardashir's son, Shapur, was an adult and led part of his father's army. The battle, during which Artabanus was slain, was a decisive victory for Ardashir. He effectively overthrew the Parthian Empire and assumed the old Persian title of king of kings.





## Sassanians versus Romans

In the wake of this victory, the Medes submitted to Ardashir's rule, and he proceeded to conquer the other western regions. Turning to the north and east, he subjugated those areas as well. Ardashir consolidated his gains by establishing a stronger, more centralized government than the Parthians'. His Sassanian Empire stretched across central Asia, from Armenia on the shores of the Mediterranean to the Indus River in modern Pakistan.

In AD 229, Ardashir and Shapur led their armies into Mesopotamia and Syria and expelled the Roman forces stationed there. At first, the Roman emperor Severus Alexander attempted a diplomatic solution and sent ambassadors to Ardashir. In these negotiations, Severus adopted an arrogant attitude to try to intimidate Ardashir, but Ardashir boldly stated that he was merely reclaiming



parts of the Persian Empire that were rightfully his by tradition and historical precedent. Then, he advanced into the Roman province of Cappadocia and laid siege to the major city of Nisibis.

Ardashir sent an embassy of his own to Severus, selecting 400 Persian noblemen who were described as “exceptionally tall” for the task and outfitting them in sumptuous clothing and golden ornaments. The ambassadors were instructed to tell the emperor that “the Great King Ardashir orders the Romans to retire from Syria and all of Asia, and to yield to Persian control as far as the Mediterranean Sea.” Severus responded by arresting all 400 noblemen and confiscating their finery.

The Romans launched an assault against Ardashir in AD 231, with armies invading on three fronts. The northern army succeeded in pushing the Sassanians out of Cappadocia. The middle force advanced against the Sassanid capital of Ctesiphon. Ardashir and Shapur chose to engage the slow-marching Roman legionaries in the open desert, where the Sassanian mounted archers had the advantage and won a great victory. The Romans retreated to their territory, and the emperor returned to Rome.

## Death and Dishonor

In AD 240, Shapur was officially proclaimed co-regent with his father, and when Ardashir died of natural causes in AD 242, Shapur became the sole king of kings. Then, Shapur had to wage a few campaigns to reassert his authority over the Medes in the west and various groups in the east. As an able and decisive commander, he quickly brought these campaigns to a conclusion.

Rome had a new emperor as well: Gordian III, who harbored dreams of recapturing the lost eastern Roman territories. Personally leading the Roman army, he drove the Sassanians out of Antioch and Nisibis and then marched toward Hatra. What happened next is unclear, since the surviving sources are incomplete and contradictory. What is certain is that Shapur led his troops into battle against the invading Romans and defeated them in AD 244. Gordian was either killed during the battle or murdered by his disaffected men during the retreat.

In the aftermath of this catastrophic defeat, the new Roman emperor, Philip the Arab, was compelled to surrender large expanses of Roman territory. Even more humbling, Philip agreed to pay Shapur 500,000 silver coins as reparations. Roman sources usually try to put a positive spin on Rome's interactions with the Sassanians, but this time, they refer to the treaty as "a most dishonorable peace."

However, the peace lasted for only a few years, and the two empires came to blows again over a border territory. Claiming that the Romans had violated the terms of the treaty, Shapur invaded Armenia and annexed it to his kingdom in AD 252. A vast Roman expedition of 60,000 men was mustered to oppose him. At the Battle of Barbalissos, Shapur's smaller army crushed this huge Roman force. He followed up this victory by plundering 37 Roman cities. One of these, Dura-Europos, was a crucial caravan waypoint—the loss of which hurt Rome economically and strategically.

## The Captive Emperor

In AD 253, the Roman Empire changed leaders again. The new emperor, Valerian, resumed the war against Shapur and skirmished with some Sassanian garrisons. Eventually, the glory-seeking Valerian invaded Shapur's empire. Shapur met him in battle, routed his legions, and took tens of thousands of Roman prisoners. Among the captives were a number of senators, high-ranking government officials, and Emperor Valerian himself.

The defeat and capture of Valerian is one of the most humiliating episodes in Roman history. Other emperors had lost battles or had even been killed, but Valerian was the first to be taken prisoner. Shapur was aware of what a propaganda coup this was and gleefully inflicted various degradations on his pet Roman emperor. For example, Shapur allegedly made Valerian serve as a human footstool that he stepped on whenever he mounted his horse. When Valerian finally expired, Shapur supposedly had his body stuffed and placed in a Zoroastrian temple, like a hunter's trophy.

While Shapur demonstrated his talent for defeating Romans, he had more trouble with the Palmyrenes, who snatched up various territories in the east while the Romans and Sassanians fought each other. The Palmyrenes

thwarted Shapur's attempts to recover these territories and even marched up to Shapur's capital of Ctesiphon—but were repelled. The Romans, Palmyrenes, and Sassanians continued squabbling over Armenia and the surrounding regions for the next decade, although the warfare was at a lower intensity than the earlier great invasions.

After a long, successful rule of 3 decades, Shapur died of an illness in AD 270. The Sassanian Empire established by Ardashir and Shapur lasted for almost another 4 centuries and continued to fight periodically with the Roman Empire and its eastern successor state, the Byzantine Empire, over the same contested regions along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean. However, neither side could achieve ultimate victory over the other. Finally, the Sassanian Empire collapsed in the mid-7th century AD, overthrown by the Muslim conquests that burst out of the Arabian Peninsula following Mohammad's establishment of Islam.

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# 20



## Zenobia and Artemisia: Warrior Queens

**A**lthough commanding armies is often thought of as a masculine activity, warrior queens in antiquity are not rare. Boudicca, Cleopatra, Tomyris, Samsi, Mavia, Semiramis, Berenice II, Dynamis, Mousa, Pythadoris, and Cartimandua are just a few of them. The repeated assertion by ancient male authors that such women were freakish exceptions appears more like an expression of the world they wanted to exist in than reality. This lecture discusses two examples: Artemisia I, who fought against the Greeks at one of the most famous naval battles in antiquity, and Zenobia, who rebelled against the Roman Empire and established an impressive empire of her own.

## The Woman Who Went to War against Greece

Around 500 BC, the wealthy kingdom of Caria, located along what is today the Anatolian coast of Turkey, was a vassal state within the sprawling superpower of the Persian Empire. Artemisia I came from a ruling family, and both her father and her husband served as the satrap, or governor, of that region. When she assumed sole rulership of Caria after her husband died, the Persian Empire and the Greek city-states were at war. Located on the boundary between the two, Caria was inevitably drawn into the conflict.

In 480 BC, Xerxes led an invasion of Greece with a gigantic army and an equally huge fleet. This combined land-sea juggernaut swept into Greece, capturing the city of Athens and burning it to the ground. The panicked Greeks retreated to southern Greece and debated how they might stand up to the larger Persian force. Having lost on land, they decided to try their luck at sea—a sound strategy, since the Greeks were highly skilled seafarers and had sizable armadas of warships.

At the ensuing Battle of Salamis fought in September of 480 BC, Artemisia commanded a section of the Persian fleet. Although Caria had contributed a relatively small contingent of five ships to the Persian armada, due to her dynamic reputation, Artemisia was put in charge of all the ships from the various kingdoms of Anatolia. Unusually, Athens offered a huge reward of 10,000 drachmas for Artemisia's capture because they "were outraged that a woman would be attacking their city," according to the Greek historian Herodotus.

Before the battle, Xerxes consulted his commanders, who all urged him to attack the waiting Greek fleet—except for Artemisia. She bluntly spoke out against the idea, but Xerxes gave the order to attack anyway. Just as she predicted, the Greek ships proved to be superior and defeated the Persian fleet. Artemisia fled the disaster by ramming one of the other Persian vessels—that of the king of Calynda, which went down with all hands.

When the captain of the Greek ship that was pursuing Artemisia witnessed her ship sinking a Persian vessel, he assumed that he had erroneously been chasing one of the Greeks' allies and broke off his pursuit. Observing the battle from a nearby mountaintop, Xerxes also assumed that she had attacked

a Greek ship. As his similarly deceived advisors praised Artemisia's display of valor while the rest of the Persian fleet was being defeated, Xerxes exclaimed in frustration, "My men have become women, and my women men!"

Xerxes held another meeting with his generals to determine what to do next. Artemisia spoke up fearlessly again and urged Xerxes to return to Persia but to leave part of his army with his general, Mardonius, to complete the conquest of Greece:

If he succeeds in the conquest ... the achievement will be yours because it was your minions who accomplished it, but if things go badly for Mardonius, and the Greeks win, it won't matter or reflect negatively upon you or your house, because the Greeks will have merely destroyed one of your slaves.

This time, Xerxes took her advice and departed. Mardonius was indeed defeated by the Greeks, and Xerxes dodged most of the blame for the loss and continued to rule Persia for another 15 years. Unfortunately, no surviving sources record what happened to Artemisia after the Battle of Salamis, so the remainder of her career remains a mystery.

## The Ruler of Palmyra

Seven hundred years later, a second dynamic woman established an even greater reputation as a warrior queen by wresting a huge chunk of territory away from the Roman Empire and founding an impressive—if short-lived—empire. Zenobia was born to an elite Palmyrene family around AD 240. Located in an oasis in the Syrian desert, Palmyra was a wealthy city through which caravans passed. It became part of the Roman province of Syria in the 1st century AD and was exposed to a variety of peoples, languages, and cultures.

Almost nothing is known of Zenobia's childhood, but she was later tutored by the famous philosopher Longinus. She was married in her teens to an older man named Odainath, and the marriage produced a son named Wahballath. Odainath was the exarch, or military commander, of the city and a Roman



senator. The Roman Empire was frequently at war with its eastern neighbor, the Sassanian Empire, and Palmyra was uncomfortably situated on the border between these two great rival empires.

By AD 260, Odainath had risen to become the ruler of Palmyra, and he successfully campaigned against the Sassanians, preventing them from gaining Roman territory. The Roman emperor Gallienus conferred various titles on Odainath in gratitude. Over the next several years, Odainath continued his campaigns against Gallienus's enemies. After winning another battle against the Sassanians, he began assuming royal titles, including the traditional Persian one of the king of kings.

Zenobia's life changed dramatically in AD 268 when Odainath was assassinated. She asserted herself and assumed the rulership of Palmyra. As one author puts it, "Then Zenobia took power. She was Odainath's wife, but she had a manly disposition, and avenged the death of her husband." The emphasis on her supposedly manly nature is a recurrent leitmotif in the ancient sources, which repeatedly praise her intellect and leadership abilities by comparing her to a man. Officially, she represented herself as a co-ruler with Wahballath, but she was clearly the one in charge.

## The Rise of the Palmyrene Empire

Gallienus was also assassinated and replaced by Claudius II, who disapproved of the autonomy and power granted to Palmyra and its rulers. At first, Zenobia sought an amicable relationship with the new emperor, but Claudius responded by dispatching an army against her. This attack failed, and Zenobia went on the offensive, launching a series of campaigns into Roman territory. She sent her army to the Roman province of Arabia, which fell to her forces in AD 270 despite a Roman legion being garrisoned there.

Late in AD 270, Zenobia sent a general named Zabdas with an army of 70,000 men to invade Egypt, one of the richest Roman provinces. They won an initial battle and captured Alexandria. After some further conflict with the Roman administrator of Egypt, Zabdas prevailed. Zenobia then turned



north, invading and conquering central Asia Minor. She now controlled nearly the entire eastern coastline of the Mediterranean and ruled over a vast Palmyrene Empire.

Nevertheless, she did not seem to want to break completely with Rome. She sought to return to the status quo under her husband, who had governed the eastern frontier but still considered himself to be acting in the name of and on behalf of the Roman Empire. However, once it became clear that Rome would never accept her, she began employing the Roman title *Augusta*, or empress, while her son gained the designations of *imperator* and *Caesar*—a direct challenge to the Roman emperor's legitimacy.

Under Zenobia, Palmyra became not just a political force but also a center of intellectual culture. Besides Longinus—one of the most respected Neoplatonic philosophers of the day—the sophist Callinicus of Petra and the historian Nicostratus of Trapezos also relocated there. Zenobia's empire was extremely diverse, incorporating substantial numbers of Jews, Manichaeans, various sects of Christians, and pagans worshipping a wide assortment of gods.

## Zenobia versus Aurelian

After Claudius, the new emperor Aurelian was determined to crush Zenobia and restore the regions she had conquered to Roman control. In early AD 272, he set out from Byzantium with an army and began marching across Asia Minor. Zenobia positioned her army in northern Syria to defend the heartland of her empire, taking the field herself instead of letting her generals direct her campaign. The two armies clashed at the Battle of Immae on the shore of a lake near Antioch.

Among the most dangerous troops in Zenobia's army was a contingent of *clibanarii*—cavalrymen encased from head to foot in heavy armor, making them the ancient equivalent of tanks. However, they were susceptible to heatstroke due to their armor, so when the Romans cleverly lured them into a lengthy chase, they became overheated and exhausted, allowing the Romans to slaughter them. Thus, Aurelian took possession of Antioch, but Zenobia and some of her forces escaped.

Meanwhile, a second Roman army executed a pincer movement from the south. Egypt and Arabia fell to this force, which continued marching to join up with Aurelian coming from the north. By the end of the summer of AD 272, Zenobia decided to make another stand, so she gathered the remnants of the Palmyrene military. She lost the Battle of Emesa and fell back to Palmyra. Although she enlisted the nomadic tribes to launch hit-and-run raids against Aurelian's army, the Romans pressed on and reached Palmyra intact.

With the Palmyrenes losing the will to fight and seeing that continued resistance was futile, Zenobia tried to escape. However, Aurelian's cavalry spotted her and gave chase. The pursuit ended dramatically, with the Romans

managing to catch up and seize her as she was attempting to board a ship. Aurelian returned to Rome with Zenobia as his prisoner. He held a triumphal procession to celebrate his victory, while she suffered the indignity of being forced to march as a captive. Her hands and feet were bound with golden shackles, and she was made to wear a heavy collar of gold.

This humiliation seemed to sate Aurelian's desire for revenge, since he then settled her and her children, including Wahballath, in a villa in the town of Tibur. She was married off to a Roman senator, and her children also married high-ranking Romans. At this point, she disappears from the historical record, and the date and cause of her death are unknown. However, several sources mention Roman aristocrats with names that suggest they were descendants of Zenobia or her children, so her line apparently prospered—although subsumed into Rome's ruling class.

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# 21



## Hypatia and Sosipatra: Female Philosophers

**D**uring the Late Antiquity period, Hypatia and Sosipatra gained widespread fame and veneration as intellectuals. Both women enjoyed considerable independence in the management of their lives, and both were not merely practitioners of philosophy but also held prominent public positions as teachers and heads of schools. Indeed, ancient authors mention at least 65 other female philosophers who lived at various times and places in the Greco-Roman world. At a time when women were excluded from most positions of authority and often regarded as intellectually inferior to men, Hypatia and Sosipatra, among others, established themselves as the foremost thinkers of their day.

## Mathematician, Astronomer, and Philosopher

Hypatia was born in Alexandria around AD 355. Her father was a wealthy and famous mathematician and philosopher named Theon, who ran a school in Alexandria called the Mouseion and wrote a well-regarded commentary on Euclid's textbook of geometry, the *Elements*. Hypatia received an elaborate education normally reserved for boys, and according to one ancient source, "She was so well educated in mathematics by her father, that she soon far surpassed him, especially in astronomy." Another notes that "she made such attainments in literature and science, as to far surpass every other philosopher of her own time."

By the time she was in her late twenties, Hypatia had established herself as the most promising intellectual in Alexandria and had transitioned from being a student in her father's school to teaching there. In addition, she proposed a new direction of thought that sought to combine the disciplines of mathematics and philosophy. In the AD 380s, Theon turned over the main teaching duties in his school to her, and she offered mathematical instruction in the tradition of her father with a new emphasis on the teachings of Plato, Aristotle, and the Neoplatonists.

Hypatia also gave public lectures—a practice that highlighted the unusualness of a philosopher of her gender. The ancient writer Socrates Scholasticus states:

Having mastered the school of Plato and Plotinus, she explained the principles of philosophy to her listeners, many of whom traveled long distances to receive her instructions. On account of her self-possession and ease of manner, resulting from the cultivation of her mind, she not infrequently appeared in public in the presence of the magistrates. She did not feel disconcerted to appear before an assembly of men. For they, on account of her extraordinary dignity and virtue, could not but admire her.

During Hypatia's time, Alexandria was a major crossroads, with goods and peoples from all over the Mediterranean, the Near East, and Africa flowing into and mingling in its harbors and streets. Its inhabitants were a mix of



cultures, religions, and ethnicities. This religious diversity became a source of internal strife and sometimes resulted in violent riots. However, Hypatia's school appealed to both Christian and pagan students, as her take on Platonism made it possible for Christians to view the philosophical systems of pagans as compatible with Christianity.

## Hypatia's Works and Admirers

Among Hypatia's students and greatest admirers was Synesius of Cyrene, who became a Christian bishop and continued to write letters to his beloved teacher long after leaving her school. He always referred to her as "The Philosopher," implying that she was unquestionably the foremost among all contemporary thinkers. In one letter, he asked her to craft a hydroscope—a device for measuring the density of liquids—for him. This is the first mention of this instrument by any author. In another letter, he said that he was sending her several philosophical treatises that he had written for her evaluation, stating that if they did not meet with her approval, he would not publish them.

At times, the passion Hypatia inspired among her male students led to awkward situations. Not only did she possess a formidable intellect, but she was also extremely beautiful. As a result, one of her students fell in love with her and lusted after her. She used his infatuation as a teaching moment to illustrate the difference between physical lust and divine love, as prescribed in the Platonic tradition. She did this by presenting him with a rag soiled with her menstrual blood to represent the impurity of the physical body and telling him, "It is only this that you love, not something truly beautiful." Ashamed, the student accepted the lesson and redirected his attention toward more spiritual forms of love.

In addition to teaching, Hypatia wrote a number of treatises, primarily commentaries on existing works. The most famous of these was an edited version of Ptolemy's *Almagest*. She also produced a mathematical commentary on Apollonius of Perga's study of conic sections in geometry and another on the 13-volume *Arithmetica* of Diophantus. Besides the hydroscope, she also

constructed astrolabes—instruments used to calculate the altitude above the horizon of celestial bodies. The resulting information could then be plugged into various calculations regarding the calendar, surveying, and triangulation.

## The Death of a Peacemaker

In the AD 390s, religious tensions in Alexandria rose due to a militant strand of Christianity that was more aggressive toward paganism and anyone believed to be associated with it. Around this time, the Christian Roman emperor Theodosius I issued decrees that dramatically restricted pagan practices in the empire and made them illegal, although many continued to follow paganism without punishment. Further complicating matters was the ambiguous power structure of the city.

The head of the government was the prefect Orestes, while the chief religious authority was the Christian patriarch of Alexandria, Theophilus. Orestes was a former student of Hypatia who continued to hold her in high esteem, whereas Theophilus enthusiastically embraced Theodosius's decrees suppressing paganism. In keeping with her welcoming attitude toward both Christian and pagan students, Hypatia played a conciliatory role in urban affairs, attempting to peacefully resolve conflicts and bring the two sides together.

In AD 412, Theophilus died and was replaced as patriarch by his nephew Cyril, a more zealous religious hard-liner. From the start, Cyril vigorously attacked those he perceived as enemies and expelled them from the city, which sparked a confrontation with Orestes, who viewed Cyril as encroaching on his sphere of governance. During this crisis, Orestes turned to Hypatia to act as a mediator, and for her efforts to make peace, she became a target of Cyril's wrath.

In March of AD 415, a Christian mob accosted Hypatia when they encountered her in the streets of the city and dragged her to a church called the Caesareum. There, they stripped her naked and savagely murdered her using roof tiles—a weapon commonly employed by ancient rioters. Her eyes were gouged out, her body torn apart, and her mutilated corpse burned. Although she sought to bring together pagans and Christians and act as a



Cyrl

peacemaker, she came to symbolize Christian oppression and intolerance. She also acquired a posthumous reputation as a martyr for free speech and philosophy and a feminist role model and hero.

## Philosopher, Teacher, and Mystic

At about the same time when Hypatia was active in Egypt, another woman living in Asia Minor also established a considerable reputation as a philosopher. Her name was Sosipatra, and she is known almost entirely from *Lives of Philosophers and Sophists* by a 4th-century-AD teacher of rhetoric named Eunapius. This work emphasizes a number of episodes in her life that feature supernatural and magical elements.

Sosipatra came from a wealthy family who lived near the major city of Ephesus. When she was 5 years old, two old men arrived to tend the grape vines on her family's estates. Under their stewardship, the grape vines yielded an unprecedented harvest, and the men declared that if Sosipatra's father entrusted her to their care to be educated for 5 years, she would flourish, and his estates would also produce great wealth. He did so, and as a result of their tutelage, she emerged with nearly superhuman intellect and knowledge. According to Eunapius:

She could readily quote the books of the poets, philosophers, and orators; and all those works that others could only dimly and partially comprehend, and then only through hard work and tireless study, whereas she could effortlessly explain them ... and make perfectly clear their meaning.

In addition, she acquired the ability to perceive things that were happening in other places and was sometimes able to predict future events. She took up residence in the city of Pergamon and operated a school of philosophy, where she lectured on Platonic and Neoplatonic themes. She also experienced mystical visions. On one such occasion, she abruptly interrupted a lecture to comment that one of her students, who was not present in the classroom that day, had just been injured in a traffic accident.

The date of Sosipatra's death, although not recorded, probably occurred toward the end of the 4th century AD. Following in her footsteps, one of her sons became a well-regarded philosopher in his own right.

Female philosophers such as Hypatia and Sosipatra can be found among the ranks of all the major philosophical schools of antiquity. They demonstrate that women could occasionally achieve positions of intellectual authority and respect in what was primarily a male-dominated world.

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# 22



## Percennius and Zenothemis: Ancient Con Men

**M**ost of this course focuses on individuals who could be regarded as heroic. However, criminals, con men, and troublemakers were as much a part of the ancient world as soldiers, athletes, and politicians. In this lecture, you'll examine the stories of Percennius and Zenothemis—forgotten antiheroes whose stories feature manipulation, mutiny, shipwreck, financial shenanigans, and insurance fraud. Their cases offer a fascinating glimpse of ancient con men at work and testify that in any era, when large sums of money are involved, some people will try to cheat the system for their benefit.



## Percennius the Mischief-Maker

Percennius was a Roman con man whose first career was in the spectacle entertainment industry of Rome, working behind the scenes at theatrical performances. The professional actors who appeared in these productions had intense rivalries, and the most important gauge of an actor's success was applause. So vital was the spectators' acclaim that it became a common practice for actors to attempt to manipulate the crowd's reactions. They did this by employing people known as *claqueurs*, who stirred up an audience to applaud or shout with fervor for the actor who hired them.

The *claqueurs*' main strategy was to secretly distribute themselves throughout an audience and pretend to be regular theatergoers. Then, they vigorously applauded in the hope that the rest of the onlookers would follow their lead and join in with equal enthusiasm. They might also shout out praise or prearranged chants and slogans. If these were catchy enough, unwitting fellow audience members would take them up, and the shouts of a few would turn into a thunderous storm of adulation for the actor.

If the *claqueurs*' efforts were too heavy-handed or obvious, the crowd might take offense at the attempt to manipulate them. The whole enterprise could backfire and sometimes result in spectators deluging the actor with boos and jeers. Therefore, *claqueurs* had to know how much enthusiasm they could get away with while making it seem natural and spontaneous. Besides talent, they also had to have an understanding of the spectators' emotions. Percennius was apparently a master of this process, as he rose to become the leader of a *claque*.

This career was just a prelude to the next stage of Percennius's life, when he employed his people-manipulation skills for a more sinister purpose. For reasons that are not recorded, Percennius quit this lucrative job and enlisted as a common legionary—a step down in terms of income and status. Unsurprisingly, his troublemaking temperament did not align well with the strict discipline of the Roman army and made him a poor soldier.

## The Mutiny

Percennius was assigned to a legion in the frontier province of Pannonia in the Balkans. In the late summer of AD 14, the three legions permanently stationed in Pannonia gathered for joint training exercises. On August 19, the emperor Augustus died. This was a dangerous moment for the Roman Empire, since Augustus was the first emperor, and a procedure for selecting his successor had not yet been established.

When the news of Augustus's death reached the Pannonian legions, Percennius took advantage of the resulting uncertainty and confusion to circulate among the legionaries and stir up unrest. He found fertile ground for his rabble-rousing because legionaries of that time had a number of legitimate reasons to be disgruntled. Their terms of enlistment were very long and had recently been extended to 20 years, and they received scanty pay. If a soldier managed to survive his term of enlistment, he was supposed to get a nice farm, but the state sometimes withheld this reward or gave out poor-quality land. Moreover, life in the legions could be very harsh, with rigorous discipline, constant hard labor, dangerous battles, and frequent beatings and abuse from the officers.

Percennius delivered a dramatic speech intended to push the legionaries over the edge into open mutiny. He began his speech with a dramatic metaphor likening the life of a legionary to that of a slave who must obey his master's every whim. He then reminded them of all the difficulties of being a soldier. Inflamed, the soldiers began rioting in the camp, and another leader emerged among them: a man named Vibulenus, who also harangued the troops and urged them not to trust the officers.

Violence broke out, and the mutineers plundered nearby villages and sought revenge against officers who had been especially cruel to them. When the new emperor Tiberius heard the news of the mutiny, he took it so seriously that he dispatched his son, Drusus, to Pannonia to negotiate with the rebellious legions. Drusus cleverly sowed discord among the troops and persuaded many of them to turn against Percennius and Vibulenus.

Furthermore, Drusus promised to plead on the soldiers' behalf with his father to address their grievances. When the men seemed amenable, Drusus ordered them to drag Percennius and Vibulenus from the crowd and summarily

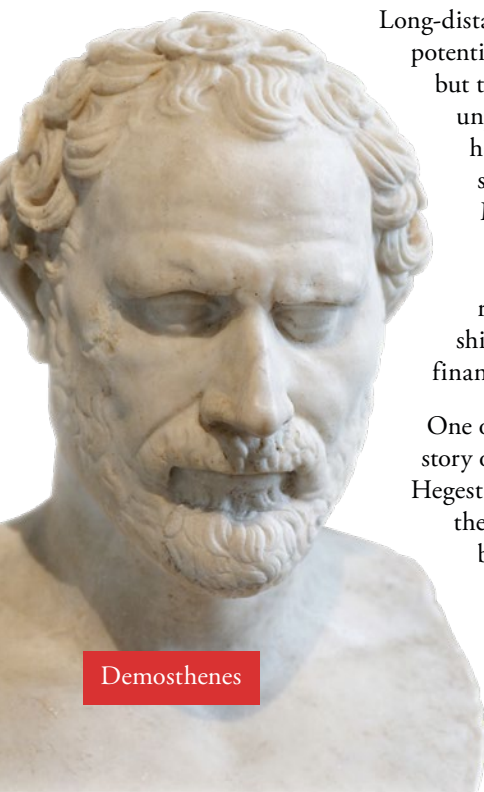
executed them. Their bodies were dumped outside the camp and left to rot in the open as an example to others of the price of disobedience. Nevertheless, Percennius did not appear to be motivated by any particular agenda. He seemed to be a born troublemaker who possessed an unusual talent for manipulating people and enjoyed making use of it without regard for the consequences.

## Zenothemis the Insurance Fraudster

Insurance fraud sounds like a modern crime, but it is at least 2,400 years old. During the 4th century BC, Athens was a litigious society, and Demosthenes—the greatest of all the Greek orators—gained fame for his skill at composing and delivering speeches at court trials. A surprising number of these speeches involved cases of maritime fraud.

Long-distance shipping was one of the most potentially lucrative businesses in antiquity, but the risks were huge. Storms at sea were unpredictable and common, navigation hazards were often unmarked, and the seas were heavily infested by pirates. Many ships were wrecked, captured, or disappeared without a trace. The combination of high risks and high rewards accompanying maritime shipping led to a great deal of creative financing.

One of Demosthenes's trial speeches tells the story of two men named Zenothemis and Hegestratus. Around 350 BC, Hegestratus was the captain of a merchant ship that traveled between Athens and Sicily, carrying cargos of grain. On a trip to Athens, the ship was transporting a load of grain purchased in Sicily by a merchant named Protus, who was on the ship



Demosthenes

as a passenger to oversee his cargo. Before leaving Sicily, Hegestratus took out a loan of money from local bankers using the grain on his ship as collateral. As he did not own the grain, this was illegal. However, he was the captain, so the bankers believed him when he alleged that it was his.

Hegestratus's friend and co-conspirator Zenothemis also took out a loan with a different banker on the same cargo of grain, falsely claiming that he was the merchant who owned it—an assertion that Hegestratus confirmed. These loans were bottomry contracts in which each man declared that he would use the loan to buy goods that he would sell for profit and then repay the loan with interest. They vouched for each other's story, and the ship itself was the collateral for both loans.

## The Con

In reality, Hegestratus and Zenothemis had no intention of buying and selling anything. They planned to deliberately sink the ship and claim that it was an accidental shipwreck. They would escape in the ship's rowboat and be excused from repaying the loans under the terms of the bottomry contract. This scheme involved not only defrauding the Sicilian bankers but also leaving Protus, the ship's crew, and the rest of the passengers to drown. Unfortunately for the conspirators, the passengers caught Hegestratus as he was drilling a hole in the bottom of the vessel.

Hegestratus made a run for the deck and threw himself over the rail in an attempt to jump into the rowboat being towed behind the ship. Unable to see well in the dark, he missed his target and fell into the sea, where he drowned. The passengers did not realize that Zenothemis was an accomplice in the plot, so he pretended that he knew nothing about it. To avoid liability for his loan, he tried to convince the crew and passengers that the vessel was so damaged that it would surely sink and therefore they should all abandon ship and flee in the rowboat.

However, Protus persuaded the crew to save the ship and his grain. Back in Athens, Zenothemis brazenly asserted that the grain belonged to him because it was collateral for a loan that he falsely claimed he had given the drowned Hegestratus. Meanwhile, Protus turned out to have purchased the grain using

a loan that he had taken out from an Athenian merchant named Demon. As fate would have it, the price of grain dropped dramatically while all this was going on, and Protus realized that he would not make enough to repay his loan to Demon if he sold the grain.

Seeing an opportunity, the unscrupulous Zenothemis offered Protus a bribe to leave Athens. Protus accepted, departed Athens, and left Demon bereft of his key witness, as Zenothemis now had the gall to bring a lawsuit against Demon, the rightful owner of the grain. Demon responded with a countersuit against Zenothemis, and unfortunately, no source records the outcome of the trial, who got the grain, or whether Zenothemis was ever punished for his criminal actions.

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# 23



## Alexander of Abonoteichus: The False Prophet

**T**his second lecture on ancient con men features a remarkable crook named Alexander of Abonoteichus, who lived during the height of the Roman Empire in the 2nd century AD and preyed on the gullibility of the faithful to enrich himself. He fabricated a fake religion—complete with an invented god, sham oracles, and bogus miracles—and set himself up as its prophet. His phony cult was so successful that senators and the Roman emperor listened to his fallacious prophecies, and official coins were minted celebrating his made-up god, which was still being worshipped 2 centuries after his death. Lucian, the ancient author who records his story, describes him as “a consummate rascal,” notorious for his “cunning schemes, audacious deceptions, and trickery.”



## The Charming Sociopath



Asclepius

Alexander was from the southeastern coast of the Black Sea in what is today Turkey. As an adolescent, he became the apprentice of a man who was allegedly a physician but was really a con artist who sold magic charms and potions. Alexander was fascinated by this man's ability to deceive and manipulate his victims and eagerly absorbed the tricks of his trade. Talented, handsome, intelligent, and charismatic, Alexander seemed to be irresistibly drawn to using his abilities for wrongdoing from an early age.

Just as Alexander was reaching adulthood, his mentor died. He fell in with a new companion: a songwriter from Byzantium named Cocconas, whom Lucian characterizes as “having an even more abominable nature than Alexander.” The two men roamed the countryside, “practicing quackery and performing magic tricks” and profiting off the credulous. Eventually, they turned their attention to devising a large-scale swindling scheme that would bring them the fame and fortune that they coveted.

Alexander and Cocconas decided that the realm of religion offered the most fertile ground for preying on people's hopes and fears, and they came up with a plan to create a fake temple and oracle. Oracular services were in high demand in the ancient world, and most required donations. Thus, the pair purchased a large tame snake and resolved to make their deity a talking snake god. They chose Alexander's home region as their temple's location because the inhabitants were superstitious and wealthy.

But first, they went to the city of Chalcedon, which was home to one of Apollo's temples, and secretly buried several bronze tablets. The inscriptions on the tablets stated that the god Asclepius, who was closely affiliated with serpents, intended to manifest himself and conveniently take up residence in Alexander's hometown of Abonoteichus. When these tablets were discovered by the locals, the people of the region were thrilled at this exciting news, and the townsfolk of Abonoteichus immediately began constructing a temple to house the forthcoming god.

## The High Priest of Glycon

Right as this plot was getting off the ground, Cocconas abruptly died. Regardless, Alexander embarked on the next step of the plan. Garbed in flashy attire, he uttered dramatic pronouncements, made more convincing by his apparently going into a prophetic trance and foaming at the mouth. Next, he inserted a live newborn snake into a hollowed-out goose egg and hid it at the temple construction site. Then, he appeared at the site naked except for a golden loincloth and proclaimed that the god's advent was imminent. Before the astonished eyes of the townspeople, he "found" and cracked open this miraculous egg. Out popped the baby snake, which he promptly hailed as the living incarnation of Asclepius.

Alexander bore this baby snake back to his home and manufactured a large serpent-head puppet with human-like features. Dressed in his most elaborate costume, he seated himself in a dark room and wound the large snake purchased earlier around his body. He concealed the real snake's head by tucking it under his armpit and positioned the fake snake-head puppet so that it was poking out from one side of his beard. To the onlookers, the tiny baby snake appeared to have supernaturally grown into a giant serpent with an uncanny humanoid head.

Visitors were allowed to file through the dimly lit room and witness the god for themselves. Alexander even invited many of them to touch the beast's body and tail. Since these belonged to a real live snake, they were convinced that it was not a trick, and the positioning of the puppet's head made it look

like it was connected to the real snake's body. Alexander announced that the snake god's name was Glycon and that he had been sent by Zeus to be a beacon to mortals.

Alexander equipped his snake-head puppet with a series of tubes leading from its mouth to a collaborator outside the room, who would shout through these tubes, thereby making it sound as if Glycon were speaking. Alexander's and Glycon's fame exploded, as pilgrims to their shrine told others that they had seen the god with a snake's body and a human head with their own eyes, touched its reptilian body with their own hands, and observed it moving and speaking with a human voice.

## Prophet to the Emperor

Alexander finally reached the long-awaited moment when he could reap the profits from his deception. He stated that Glycon would deliver prophecies to those who submitted a question and paid a fee of 8 obols—equivalent to an average worker's daily wage. Through this scheme, he reaped an income of nearly half a million obols per year. Soon, the temple was completed. He moved his operation into it and employed a retinue of assistants to help him manage the volume of supplicants who came to present their questions to Glycon.

Among the army of workers that Alexander ultimately assembled Lucian lists clerks, ushers, accountants, information collectors, sealers, oracle composers, oracle writers, and men that he dispatched to spread rumors of his oracle in distant lands, thereby stirring up more future business. The reputation of his temple grew, and people began to ascribe not only oracles but also miraculous acts to Glycon, such as curing incurable diseases and raising the dead.

Skeptics who questioned the legitimacy of Alexander's cult began to emerge, such as the followers of the Epicurean school of philosophy. However, their voices were drowned out by the far greater numbers of zealous converts who wholeheartedly believed in Glycon's prophecies and miracles. Alexander's fame spread across the empire, reaching Italy and the capital city of Rome. Roman elites, including a number of senators, were taken in by the scam and became customers of the oracle.



Word of Alexander and Glycon even reached Marcus Aurelius, who was overseeing a difficult war against the Germanic barbarian tribes. According to Alexander, Glycon had pronounced that the emperor would be victorious if he sacrificed two lions by casting them into the Danube River to drown. The Glycon cult had become so influential that the normally rational Aurelius felt compelled to follow these bizarre instructions. However, things did not go as planned because the lions displayed an unexpected aptitude for swimming and managed to reach the far side of the river. The Germans promptly beat the creatures to death with clubs, and the Romans suffered a severe defeat soon after. Alexander then issued a statement asserting that Glycon had only foretold that victory would result from the sacrifice of the lions but had not specified which side would win.

## The Cult of the Snake God

Such occasional blunders did not seem to harm the oracle's reputation. Prophetic pronouncements in the ancient world were often phrased in a vague or ambiguous manner, leaving room for reinterpretation if they turned out poorly. Furthermore, the cult of Glycon attracted a fervent following whose desire to believe outweighed any inconsistencies in the prophecies. So, Alexander continued to rake in money.

He staged an extravagant three-day religious festival celebrating his cult, which included elaborate performances and reenactments of Glycon's miraculous birth. Alexander persuaded the state to mint a series of coins adorned with images of the emperor on one side, Glycon depicted as a snake with human hair on the reverse, and the inscription "Glycon of Abonoteichos."

Lucian lived at the same time as Alexander and was something of a religious skeptic. He also harbored an admiration for several schools of philosophy—including Alexander's foes, the Epicureans. Lucian repeatedly attempted to expose Alexander and his oracle as fraudulent and made efforts to convince the false prophet's most prominent adherents to withdraw their support. He eventually became such a thorn in Alexander's side that Alexander tried to kill him. Thus, when Lucian was taking a voyage by ship, Alexander bribed the captain to throw Lucian overboard. Fortunately for Lucian, the captain did not want to commit murder, so he revealed the plot to Lucian and set him safely ashore.

Despite the skepticism of Lucian and those like him, Alexander continued to prosper throughout the reigns of several emperors, and his invented religion attracted followers all across the Roman world. Although Glycon had issued a prophecy that Alexander would live to the age of 150 years, this particular prophecy did not pan out. When he was 70, Alexander suffered a leg injury that became gangrenous and infested with maggots, ultimately resulting in his death.

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# 24



## Farmers: Antiquity's Greatest Unsung Heroes

**T**hink of all the interesting people discussed in this course: generals, inventors, politicians, philosophers, athletes, doctors, kings, queens, emperors, tyrants, priestesses, intellectuals, authors, and businesspeople. The truth is that they only accounted for 10% of those who lived in the ancient world, and they were only able to exist due to the labor of farmers. All the dazzling accomplishments of civilization rest upon anonymous farmers, making this 80–90% of the population the greatest unsung heroes of antiquity. They provided life-giving support to the ones who wrote all the literature, created all the art, fought all the battles, and did almost all of what is conventionally defined as making up history.





## The Life of a Farmer

Margins of survival were thin in the ancient world, and agricultural productivity was limited. About nine people had to labor full time as farmers to produce enough surplus to support a single non-farmer. With a population nearing a million people at times, Rome required around 250,000 tons of grain a year, and millions of farmers in the provinces toiled in the fields to supply it. However, depictions of ancient Greece and Rome in novels, documentaries, and movies always seem to focus on soldiers, politicians, or priests. More problematically, most educational and scholarly works do so as well.

So, what was it like to be a farmer in the ancient world? Here is the Roman poet Horace's description of life on the farm:

Happy is the man who remains far from the world of business, as did our puritan ancestors, and who cultivates the family farm with his own oxen. ... He trains the mature tendrils of his grapevines ... or he stands in a secluded valley and surveys his herds of lowing cattle as they graze ... or he stores every last drop of honey in clean jars. ... How pleasant it is to lie

down, sometimes under an ancient oak, sometimes on the matted grass; and meanwhile the stream glides by between its high banks, and the birds warble in the trees.

As idyllic as this sounds, Horace never had to support himself by farming. By contrast, the Greek poet Hesiod, who was a poor family farmer, emphasized the unending cycle of brutal labor that constituted real farmers' lives in his poem *Works and Days*:

You must strip down to sow, and to plough, and to reap, if you hope to harvest Demeter's grain in due season; or else, you will come up short, and have to go begging at other men's houses.  
... Work, Fool! Do the work which the gods have ordained for men.

The reality of farm life was that it was incredibly difficult, and one was always on the brink of disaster and starvation. For most of the human beings who have lived on Earth prior to the Industrial Revolution, life as an agricultural worker involved unrelenting, back-breaking labor; monotonous, repetitive tasks inherent in raising crops; incessant danger from bad weather and bandits; and grinding poverty.

## Growing the Grain

Ancient civilizations, such as the Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Persians, and Carthaginians, all depended heavily on cereal crops for sustenance. Various forms of wheat were probably the most prized, but many other cereals—such as barley, spelt, millet, and rye—were also grown for human consumption and as fodder for animals. Many cultures used a biennial crop rotation system in which half of one's farmland was left fallow each year to recover nutrients and moisture.

Before seeds could be sown, the field required a great deal of preparatory work. Farmers had to plow the ground multiple times to break up the dirt and make it receptive to seed, with one ancient author recommending no

fewer than nine separate plowings at various stages. Next, the lumps in the overturned soil needed to be broken up, either by hoeing and raking or dragging a harrow across the ground. Another vital step was manuring. Ancient farmers did not have modern fertilizers available to them, but they did have the manure produced by themselves and their animals.



Once all that was completed, the farmers were finally ready to grow the grain. The ability to spread the seed widely and evenly but not wastefully required much skill and practice. While the seeds germinated, the farmers had to yank out the weeds. Then, they waited patiently and hoped that no disasters befell the growing grain. Among the myriad threats that might damage a crop were insects, vermin, birds, drought, floods, frost, hail, violent storms, fire, plant diseases, and human raiders.

One of the most common and problematic diseases that could spoil cereal crops was wheat rust—a fungal disease that produced red or orange blotches on the plants. Unsurprisingly, several major religious holidays were dedicated to invoking protection from the gods for the crops. For example, a Roman festival known as the Robigalia, held on April 25, involved the sacrifice of a puppy with a red coat to help avert the growth of red-colored rust on the wheat. Another important holiday in late April was the Cerealia, in which torches were tied to foxes' tails, which were set on fire, and the unfortunate burning animals were released to run frantically around the Circus Maximus.

## Finally, the Harvest

If, miraculously, none of the possible disasters occurred and the wheat reached maturity, it was time to harvest. Harvesting required yet more intensive human labor and involved sawing or cutting off the stalks individually. The harvested stalks were placed in baskets and taken to the threshing floor, where the grain kernels were separated from the husk. Then, winnowing separated the chaff. The by-products from all these stages, including the chaff, straw, and stubble in the field, were collected and employed in various ways, such as animal fodder or fertilizer.

After obtaining a quantity of grain at last, the farmers had to preserve it so that it would be available to eat over the course of the year and sow the next year's crop. They had to keep the grain dry and within a narrow temperature range to prevent rotting or developing harmful molds and funguses. They also needed to safeguard the grain from pests and vermin—chiefly mice and weevils. Constructing a proper granary was crucial to preserving the grain, as illustrated by the extremely lengthy discussions that all the ancient agricultural writers devote to this topic.

So, after all that, what did the farmer reap from his efforts? In the ancient Mediterranean, with the right soil and weather, 10 pounds of grain were harvested for every pound planted. A ratio of 10 to 1 might sound satisfactory, but that yield had to feed the farmer, his family, his servants, and his animals for an entire growing season. Additionally, a significant proportion of the crop had to be put aside as seed for the next year's sowing. After accounting for spoilage and taxes, the farmer would be lucky if he ended up with any surplus at all.

## Grapes, Olives, and Other Products

Grapes and olives—also staple Mediterranean crops—were potentially more profitable than grain, but each had high start-up costs and a long wait before the first crop could be harvested. Grapes were used to make wine, which formed a significant component of the ancient daily caloric intake. Grape vines demanded constant care, with frequent pruning of branches and roots, fertilization, weeding, and watering. If the grapes were not destroyed by disease, pests, and bad weather or stolen by humans, then they had to be carefully picked by hand, dried in the sun, placed in a vat, and trampled. The resulting juice was stored and fermented to transform it into wine.

Olive oil was also essential to ancient Mediterranean culture and life. Although they did not require as much maintenance as grape vines, the downside of growing olive trees is that a tree begins to yield olives only after 5 years. Moreover, it bears a full crop of olives only every other year. Therefore, a mature olive tree represented a valuable long-term investment, and in such states as ancient Athens, anyone who cut one down was punished. Harvesting the olives was labor-intensive because one had to pick the fruit by hand—using ladders to reach the higher branches.

Other significant crops in antiquity included vegetables, herbs, and legumes and pulses—such as beans and lentils. Ancient cultures often practiced intercropping, whereby multiple crops were planted in the same fields. Cereals and legumes grew particularly well together, as they worked symbiotically to improve soil quality and yield. Some people also had small vegetable gardens, which could provide an important supplement to their diet, such as lettuces,

carrots, cabbage, turnips, beets, radishes, onions, and garlic. A wide range of trees bearing fruits and nuts were also cultivated on farms, with fig trees being especially popular.

As well as cultivating crops, many farmers practiced animal husbandry by raising goats, sheep, pigs, cattle, and horses. Sheep were the source of one of the most widely used textile products—wool—while also yielding milk. Another important source of milk was goats, and both sheep and goat milk were often transformed into cheese and stored for the future. Pigs were raised exclusively for their meat, as pork was popular among the Romans. The majority of recipes calling for meat in surviving Roman cookbooks, such as *Apicius*, are pork dishes. Cattle were not a significant source of milk or meat, although they were not unusual animals to find on a farm, especially wealthier ones. Honey was the main sweetener available to Mediterranean civilizations, so many farms would have kept some bee hives.

### Reading

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