

## Life in Rome in the Late Republic

Source: Sallust, *Conspiracy of Catiline* 11–16. From: William Stearns Davis, ed., *Readings in Ancient History: Illustrative Extracts from the Sources*, 2 Vols. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1912-13), Vol. II: Rome and the West, pp. 135-138. Scanned by: J. S. Arkenberg, Dept. of History, Cal. State Fullerton. Prof. Arkenberg has modernized the text.

*From the pessimistic point of view of the historian Sallust, Catiline's anarchistic conspiracy of 63 BCE was only possible in a society in which there were a great number of depraved and desperate men, ready for any enterprise, however villainous. (Sallust's view of the depravity the late Republic had reached is clear from the opening sentence of this excerpt.) For such spirits Catiline was an ideal leader. In this quotation from Sallust we see how it became possible for him to find a large following, and what manner of man he was personally.*

After Sulla had recovered the government by force of arms, everybody became robbers and plunderers. Some set their hearts on houses, some on lands. His victorious troops knew no restraint, no moderation, but inflicted on the citizens disgraceful and inhumane outrages. The whole period was one of debauched tastes and lawlessness. When wealth was once counted an honor, and glory, authority, and power attended it, virtue lost her influence, poverty was thought a disgrace, and a life of innocence was regarded as a life of mere ill nature. From the influence of riches, accordingly, luxury, avarice, pride came to prevail among the youth. They grew at once rapacious and prodigal. They undervalued what was their own; they set at naught modesty and continence; they lost all distinction between sacred and profane, and threw off all consideration and self-restraint.

It is a serious matter for reflection, after viewing our modern mansions and villas, extended to the veritable size of cities, to contemplate the temples which our ancestors a most devout race of men, erected to the gods. But our forefathers adorned the fanes of the deities with devotion, and their homes with their own glory, and took nothing from what they conquered but the power of doing harm; their descendants on the contrary have even wrested from their allies, with rank injustice, whatever their brave and victorious ancestors had left to their vanquished enemies—as if the only use of power was to inflict injury. Why should I mention these displays of extraordinary luxury which now set in, which can be believed only by those who have seen them; as, for example, how mountains have been leveled, and seas actually built over with edifices by many a private citizen—men whom I deem to have made a sport of their wealth, since they were impatient to squander disreputably what they might have enjoyed with honor.

But the love of irregular gratification, open debauchery, and all kinds of luxury had spread abroad with no less force. Men and women alike threw off all restraints of modesty. To gratify appetite they sought for every kind of production by land or sea. They slept before there was any natural inclination to sleep. They no longer waited to feel hunger, thirst, or fatigue, but anticipated them all by luxurious indulgence. Such

propensities drove young men, when their patrimonies were run through, to criminal practices; for their minds, impregnated with evil habits, could not easily abstain from gratifying their passions, and were thus the more inordinately devoted in every way to rapacity and extravagance.

In so populous and corrupt a city Catiline easily kept about him, as a bodyguard, crowds of the lawless and desperate. All the shameless libertines and profligate rascals were his associates and intimate friends—the men who had squandered their paternal estates by gaming, luxury, sensuality, and all too who had plunged heavily into debt to buy immunity for crimes; all assassins or sacrilegious persons from every quarter, convicted, or dreading conviction for their misdeeds; all, likewise, for whom their tongue or hand won a livelihood by perjury or bloodshed; all, in short, whom wickedness, poverty, or a guilty conscience goaded were friends to Catiline.

If any man of character as yet unblemished fell into his society, he presently rendered him by daily intercourse and temptation like to and equal to the rest. But it was the young whose acquaintance he chiefly courted and easily ensnared. For as the passions of each, according to his years, were aroused, he furnished mistresses to some, bought horses and dogs for others, and spared, in a word, neither his purse nor his character, if he could make them his devoted and trustworthy supporters.

Catiline was alleged to have corrupted a Vestal Virgin, and wrought many vile crimes; at last, smitten with a passion for a certain Aurelia, he murdered his own grown-up son, because she objected to marrying him and having in the house a grown-up stepson. And this crime seems to me to have been the chief cause of hurrying forward his conspiracy. For his guilty mind, at peace neither with gods nor men, found no comfort either waking or sleeping, so utterly did conscience desolate his tortured spirit. His complexion, in consequence, was pale, his eyes haggard, his walk sometimes quick and sometimes slow, and distraction was plainly evident in every feature and look.

The young men he enticed by various methods into evil practices. From among them he furnished false witnesses and forgers of signatures; and he taught them all to regard with equal unconcern property and danger. At length when he had stripped them of all character and shame he led them to other and greater iniquities. When there was no ready motive for crime, he nevertheless stirred them up to murder quite inoffensive persons, just as if they had injured him, lest their hand or heart should grow torpid for want of employment. Trusting to such confederates and comrades, and knowing that the load of debt was everywhere great, and that the veterans of Sulla, having spent their money too freely, now were longing for a civil war, remembering their spoils and former victory, Catiline accordingly formed the design of overthrowing the government.