

# Information on Sallust

## Biographical Briefing

Gaius Sallustius Crispus (pronounced GY-uss sah-LUSS-tee-uss KRIS-puss)—known as Sallust (pronounced SAH-lust)—was born in 86 B.C.E. into a wealthy family of the business class. In the early part of his career, Sallust entered politics. While he was in his thirties, he served in various positions in Rome and Italy, until his political enemies forced him from the Senate. However, Julius Caesar reinstated him, and Sallust became one of Caesar's supporters.

Sallust's political career benefited from the great expansion of the empire. In 46 B.C.E. he became governor of the province of Africa. While serving there, he accumulated a large fortune, but his administration was caught up in a scandal. Sallust was accused of collecting his wealth by force, or *extortion*, from the people living in the province. He returned to Rome to face charges for this crime. However, with Caesar's help, he was never convicted. Still, the scandal was serious enough to force Sallust to retire from politics.

Sallust then turned his attention to writing and became a noted historian. In his writings, he used different methods to narrate various historical events. For one account, he relied on literary sources of the time to re-create the mood of the state, rather than just describing the factual events. For another account, he carefully researched the facts and presented them in a straightforward, objective style. Sallust's writing styles influenced the writing styles of future Roman historians. Sallust's most noted writings are his *Histories*, his account of the period of Roman history from 78 to 67 B.C.E. Unfortunately, much of these writings have been lost. In his writings Sallust paid tribute to Rome's military conquests, but later in life he expressed some regret that expansion had helped cause greed in the aristocracy, which brought corruption to the country. Sallust died in 35 B.C.E.



- What important experiences did Sallust have before becoming governor of the province of Africa?
- Why was Sallust forced to retire from politics?
- Why is Sallust considered an important Roman historian?
- How did his opinions of Rome's expansion change at the end of his life?

**Position:** Sallust believed that expansion helped Rome because it created new economic opportunities for many Romans.

### Main Points on Roman Expansion

Military conquests helped increase the economic opportunities in Rome and created a new, large class of wealthy citizens. The government created many new business opportunities, and people had many new areas in which to invest.

During the Punic Wars, the government needed companies to provide food, clothing, and other supplies for the army. After the wars, the government leased newly acquired mines, forests, quarries, and fisheries to people who had money to take advantage of these resources. A new group of middle-class business leaders, called *equestrians* (pronounced eh-KWESS-tree-inz), emerged to head these companies, since tradition prevented the senatorial class from running them.

Military conquests gave Rome new provinces, and they provided more opportunities for wealth. First, taxes could be collected. The Roman government sold contracts for tax collection to people called *publicans*. Publicans paid for these contracts in advance. They were to collect taxes amounting to 10 percent above the price of the contract. However, as in other businesses, there was much corruption. Most publicans made huge profits from their tax-collecting efforts. In addition, Roman businessmen engaged in money lending in the provinces, sometimes charging as much as 48 percent interest on their loans.

Stop Here  
& Discuss



- What economic opportunities did Rome's expansion create for wealthy citizens?
- Who were the equestrians, and how did they benefit from Rome's expansion?
- How did publicans and moneylenders benefit from Rome's expansion?