

**[Paula James** *voice-over*]

Finally, fifth-century Athens gives us the first surviving ancient prose texts. One of the most substantial of them is the history of the war between Athens and its rival Sparta as narrated by the general Thucydides. You study one of the key passages of his account, a speech he gives to the Athenian leader Pericles, seemingly extolling the virtues of Athens. But we ask whether it's really that straightforward.

Leaving Athens and the Greeks we move on to the Romans. During the last four centuries BCE, Rome grew from being a local power in central Italy into a

city that dominated the Mediterranean world. This was achieved by a strong political system, a competitive élite and military strength. But in the space of sixty years it all went wrong in Rome. The political system collapsed into bloody civil war and the old order of a political class sharing power was replaced by one man – the emperor Augustus – monopolising power and politics. In Block 3 you study the history of Republican Rome. How the republic was organised politically; how political rivalry turned into civil war; and also how culture and the arts flourished alongside the civil discord. Cities were built across Italy, spreading Roman ways of living as Rome conquered its Italian and Greek neighbours.

**[Phil Perkins interview]**

The city of Paestum is a good example of how people interacted over the Mediterranean. You can look at city and visit it, and see clearly Greek things, but then you can also see things that derive more from local Italian influences, and you can study how they combined together to produce something that is different and new. The Greek settlers there made a wonderful city, but they weren't politically strong enough to maintain it. As the Roman Republic expanded, the armies of Rome were so powerful that they conquered the whole of southern Italy, including the city of Paestum. Settlers came from Rome, and brought with them their gods, their ways of life, their religion, their connections, their ways of doing things, and the result was a completely new way of living, a Roman way of living.

**[Paula James voice-over]**

Rome itself grew into a showcase of architecture with new buildings paid for by the conquests of Rome's generals. The city centre became a monument to Roman achievements and history. The writing of history was for Greeks and Romans a branch of the arts. Poetry as well as prose could explain, justify and even question the past and present deeds of Rome.

**[Phil Perkins interview]**

The city of Rome has been continuously occupied for over three thousand years, with each generation building on top of the remains of previous generations. In some cases, previous earlier buildings are completely removed; in other cases bits are taken and redeveloped, and so as time progresses some fragments survive and others don't. So if we're going back some two thousand five hundred years to the Roman Republic there is very little that remains intact just as it was made, and the challenge that we face is

trying to sort them out and find out where the Roman Republic actually remains.

**[Paula James voice-over]**

Within all of this cultural, political and historical change you meet individuals, some famous, some unheard of. Some like Julius Caesar changed their world, others like the Etruscan noblewoman Seianti, whose sarcophagus can today tell us so much about her life, reflect the world they lived in.

Block 4 stays with the Romans and studies Roman social history. Who lived in the city of Rome and how did the different social groups interact? In this part of the course you explore topics such as slavery, patronage and the family, and consider where people lived and the public spaces such as theatres, amphitheatres and the baths where they interacted. The available evidence is rich and varied – literature in all its forms, inscriptions, epitaphs, buildings, mosaics, frescos, tombs and coins. All types of evidence have the potential to reveal something about Roman social relationships.

**[Valerie Hope interview]**

Epitaphs and gravestones of the Roman period are a particularly fascinating source for the Roman social historian, because they give us insights into groups of people such as women, freed slaves, slaves and the poor that other sources just don't give us. But I think one of the challenges of working with this particular type of evidence is to think about the context in which these things were made and put up; we need to think about the conventions involved and the ideals that were portrayed through this particular medium.

Some of the fundamental questions we need to ask involve date: when was a tombstone set up? We also need to think about where it was placed: what was the original environment like? What memorials would have been placed adjacent to this particular monument or tombstone? We also need to think about how the person commemorated is described: what type of language is used? Were there any images or pictures cut into the stone?

**[Paula James voice-over]**

We always need to be aware of the nature and limitations of the evidence. One of the great challenges in studying Roman social history is getting past the inherent biases present in the sources. The written texts in particular tend to represent the voices of educated wealthy men. Can we recreate the experiences and perspectives of women, children and slaves? Only by

## A219 DVD1

studying a variety of evidence and by carefully evaluating its context can we begin to recreate and explore differing perspectives.

This block, like the course as a whole, is about posing questions, finding ways of investigating these questions and evaluating the extent to which we can answer them, and thus in the process expanding our knowledge of life in the city of Rome.

At the end of the course, there is a short fifth block which looks back at the whole course, ties up some loose ends and helps you prepare for the exam. I hope you look forward to your explorations.