

turies A.D., when the Mediterranean had become one world politically as well as culturally, the same motives put infinitely greater numbers on the sea and roads, and their movements extended far further in all directions. Businessmen and government personnel now moved about from Britain to India, Asclepius' sanctuaries catered to an international clientele, the games drew spectators from everywhere—and so many more were able to indulge in the pastime of sightseeing that, as will appear in due course, the topic calls for full-scale treatment.

## 9

## On the Sea

When Pliny the Elder, compiling his encyclopedia in the second half of the first century A.D., turned to the subject of flax he waxed rhapsodic. 'What greater miracle is there', he wrote, 'than this plant which has brought Italy so close to Egypt that Galerius arrived at Alexandria just seven days after leaving the Strait of Messina . . . , which has put Cadiz within seven days of Ostia and the nearer coast of Spain within four?' The ancients used sails of linen spun from flax (cotton, an exotic import from India, was chiefly for fine garments), and Pliny is referring to record runs made by the clippers of his day. To go from Italy to Spain by land would have taken a month, to Alexandria well-nigh two. And, even in cases where the length of a trip was the same over land as by sea, it was infinitely less wearing to pass the days lolling on a deck than walking or riding a mule or mule-drawn carriage. On the other hand, there was the matter of danger to balance against comfort. Rome's efficient administration, at least during the first two centuries A.D., had swept the seas clear of pirates and chased away most of the bandits from the main highways. But the perils of storm were something else again; no matter how careful a skipper was in picking the right season and winds for a sailing, the unexpected could always happen. People on the road trudged or jolted along at a snail's pace, but at least they were spared worries about shipwreck. And the Romans, a lubberly lot in general, were particularly nervous when it came to sea voyages. Time and again their

writers fearfully bring up the mere finger's breadth of plank that separates a sailor from a watery death, and the farewell poems they address to friends departing for overseas sometimes read like elegies on their certain death.

There was yet another factor which anyone choosing between land and sea had to keep in mind: ship passages were not available all year round. In ancient times the sailing season was limited by and large to the period from May to October. This was partly because of the severe storms of winter, but even more because of the increased amount of cloudiness that occurs between fall and spring. In the days before the invention of the mariner's compass, sailors plotted their courses by landmarks or the sun during the day and by the stars at night; they gambled on getting good weather, and the odds were with them only in the summer months. Movement by water between October and May did not completely stop, but it was always exceptional—the transport of troops to meet an emergency, the hauling of cargo to alleviate a serious shortage—and could play little part in the planning of itineraries.

Rome, Antioch, Caesarea, Alexandria, Carthage, Cadiz, Cartagena, Tarragona, Narbonne, Marseilles, Arles—these were the chief entrepôts that ringed the Mediterranean. Sealanes crossed from one to the other, while coastal sailings connected each with the neighbouring smaller ports to either side. Rome, the capital and centrally located, was inevitably the best served, with routes fanning out in all directions.

For travellers heading for the eastern Mediterranean from anywhere within the western part of the empire, Rome was far and away the best jump-off point. To get to Egypt there were the fast sailings offered by the Alexandria-Rome grain fleet (158 below). To get to Greece, there were at least two feasible alternatives. The all-water route went from Rome (or Naples) through the Straits of Messina and around the Peloponnese to Corinth and Athens. Those willing to include some travel on land went by road to Brindisi, where they

boarded a boat which carried them across the Adriatic and through the Gulf of Corinth to Corinth's harbour on the west side of the isthmus; if headed for Athens, they walked across to the sister harbour on the east side and continued by water. From either Athens or Corinth it was an easy sail across the Aegean to Ephesus or Smyrna, the chief ports of Asia Minor, and from either of these there were coastal craft to carry passengers north or south. Those leaving from Rome for Asia Minor who wanted to bypass Greece could get a direct sailing to Rhodes or the Asia Minor ports.

The time a voyage took depended on the winds and the type of craft chosen, whether a seagoing vessel that went straight over open water or something smaller that stayed close to shore. Ranking government officials occasionally travelled on war galleys placed at their disposal by the Roman navy; since these were little more than oversize racing shells, they necessarily followed the coasts and put into harbour every night. When Cicero left Athens for Ephesus in 51 B.C., en route to the southern part of Asia Minor where he was to assume his duties as a governor, he was put aboard a light naval unit, one of a flotilla. The ships set sail on 6 July, made their way through the Aegean islands (Ceos-Gyaros-Syros-Delos-Samos), with a stop at each one of them, and finally arrived on the 22nd—more than two weeks after departure. His return to Athens, once more on one of a flotilla of galleys, again took two weeks. The distance they covered over the open sea was no more than two hundred nautical miles or so, which even a slow-paced sailing vessel could have done in three or four days. In recompense every night Cicero enjoyed a shore-based meal and a night's sleep in a stable bed.

What principally determined the speed, and at times even the direction, of travel by water were the summer trade winds of the Mediterranean, the Etesians or 'yearly winds' as the ancients called them. These blow consistently from the northern quadrant. Thus the voyage from Rome to Alexandria was apt to be a traveller's dream: with the prevailing wind on

the stern, he could generally count on a quick and easy run of ten days to three weeks. But he paid the price on the return, which could take as much as two months or more. The same winds, adverse now all the way, forced vessels into a roundabout course via the south coast of Asia Minor, Crete, Malta, and Sicily, much of which they had to cover beating against headwinds. The voyage from Rome to Corinth or back involved both fair and foul winds and consequently took between one and two weeks. When Pliny the Younger, nephew of the encyclopedist, left the capital to take up his post as governor of the province of Bithynia on the north coast of Asia Minor, he sailed directly from Rome to Ephesus but, from there on, he was compelled for at least part of the way to take to the roads since the Etesians ruled out making the whole trip from Ephesus north to the Hellespont by water.

Ancient ships never had towering tiers of canvas. Their drive was principally supplied by a big square mainsail (Fig. 6). By Roman times a small triangular topsail had been added that was useful for catching upper airs during light winds or calms. Forward was a small squaresail, much like the bowsprit-sail of the eighteenth century (cf. Fig. 16); it served the same purpose, to aid in manoeuvring the vessel; the very largest ships added a mizzen of modest size. It was no rig for developing speed, particularly on the capacious big-bellied hulls the Greeks and Romans favoured. Even before a fine breeze from the right quarter, their ships did no better than six knots. Thus the voyage, say, from Gibraltar to Rome or Carthage never took less than a week. Narbonne was at the very least three days from Rome, Corinth five, Rhodes seven, Alexandria ten. Byzantium (Constantinople) to Rhodes was at least five days, to Alexandria nine. These, we must remember, were optimum voyages; if the return involved sailing from southeast to northwest, against, that is, the prevailing northerlies, it could take twice as long or more.

There were no such things as passenger vessels in the

ancient world. Travellers did as they were to do until the packet ship finally made its debut in the nineteenth century: they went to the waterfront and asked around until they found a vessel scheduled to sail in a direction they could use. 'In Constantinople', writes Libanius, describing his travels in c. A.D. 340, 'I went down to the Great Harbour and made the rounds asking about vessels sailing for Athens.' When St Paul was sent from Caesarea in Palestine to stand trial in Rome, he boarded a ship making for the south coast of Asia Minor, which happened to be on his line of course; arriving at the port of Myra there, he had the luck to find a freighter on the Alexandria-Rome run in harbour and booked passage on it. Rome offered a convenient service which spared people much weary tramping along the waterfront. Its port was located at the mouth of the Tiber. In the town of Ostia nearby was a big piazza surrounded by offices. Of these, many belonged to the shippers of various seaports: the shippers of Narbonne had one, the shippers of Carthage had another, the shippers of Carales in Sardinia still another, and so on. Anyone seeking a sailing had only to check at the offices of whatever cities lay along his route.

Since the vessels were first and foremost for cargo and carried passengers only incidentally, they provided neither food nor services. The crews were solely for working ship; there were no stewards among them to prepare meals or tend cabins. As in earlier times (66 above), voyagers went aboard with their own servants to take care of their personal needs and with supplies of food and wine (the ships did furnish water) to sustain them until the next port of call where there would be a chance to obtain replenishments.

Having selected his sailing, a traveller arranged to book passage with the *magister navis* 'master of the ship', the officer charged with the business side of a voyage, the maintenance of the vessel, and similar matters; on small ships he could be the owner as well, on large he was most often the owner's or charterer's representative. The actual handling of the vessel

under way was left to the sailing master, the *gubernator* or *kybernetes* as he was called in Latin and Greek respectively. A booking rarely involved a cabin, since cabin space was at a premium (cf. Fig. 6). The *magister* and *gubernator* most likely each had one of their own, and on big seagoing freighters there were a few available for VIPs or the very wealthy, but the great majority of travellers simply purchased deck passage. They slept in the open or under little tentlike shelters that their servants put up every evening and took down every morning. Most ships, even quite small ones, had a well-fitted galley with a hearth for cooking. The crew very probably had first call upon it, but no doubt hours were set aside when passengers were allowed to send their servants to prepare food.

With his passage arranged, the traveller's next move was to secure an exit pass—or at least in some ports, for we are not sure whether such passes were required everywhere. They certainly were for people departing from Egypt, but Egypt, because of its vital importance as a source of food and revenue, was in many respects under more stringent regulation than the other provinces of the Empire. To leave from Alexandria, for example, one had to apply to the governor who, if disposed to approve, would authorize a port official to issue a pass. These involved a fee, which apparently varied widely according to the trade of the applicant. A price list of A.D. 90 for passes to leave Egypt by way of a Red Sea port has luckily been preserved, and it reveals an amazing range. The captain of a merchant ship paid 8 drachmae, some of his ratings 10, his sailors and ship's carpenter 5. A skilled labourer paid the same as the captain, 8. The government seems to have been out to discourage women from leaving, because common-law wives of army men were charged 20, and prostitutes no less than 108.

When the day of departure drew near, the traveller set about packing his bags (*viduli, manticae*; cf. Fig. 13). Like some voyagers right up to the last century, in addition to clothing he took along a battery of things needed for cooking,

eating, bathing, sleeping—from pots and pans down to mattresses and bedding. And, as mentioned above, he had to find room for provisions, an item that on certain voyages—the run over open water from Rome to Alexandria, say, a minimum of ten days—could bulk formidably large. He then transferred with it all and his servants to a waterfront inn or to the house of some friend who lived near the harbour. Here he stood by with his ears cocked for the cry of a herald making the rounds to announce the departure of his vessel. He had to do it this way because ships never left on a fixed schedule. First they had to await the arrival of a wind from the right quarter. Then there was the matter of the omens. The Roman Imperial age, as I have mentioned (134 above), was a superstitious one in general, and seamen are a particularly superstitious lot. On many days of the year the religious calendar forbade business of any sort, and this included the departure of ships. Then there were days, like our Friday the 13th, which were ill-omened; e.g., no Roman skipper would shove off from a port on 24 August, 5 October, or 8 November, and the end of the month as a whole was considered no time to be found on the water.

Assuming that the wind was favourable and there was nothing wrong with the date, the ship's authorities would proceed to make a pre-sailing sacrifice (a sheep or a bull; Poseidon preferred bulls), and, if the omens during this were not right, the sailing had to be delayed. If the wind was favourable, if there was nothing wrong with the date, and if the sacrifice had gone off as desired, superstition still left a gamut of bad omens to be run: a sneeze as you went up the gangplank was bad (although if you had sneezed to the right during the sacrifice, that was good), a crow or a magpie sitting, croaking, in the rigging was bad, a glimpse of some wreckage on the shore was bad, the uttering of certain words or expressions were bad. A sailing could also be held up by dreams, if a voyager or the ship's officers took them seriously, as so many of the age did. According to an ancient book on the

subject, to dream of turbid waters or a key or an anchor was an unmistakable veto on travel by sea. Goats presaged big waves or storm—and terribly big, if the goats were black. Wild boars meant violent storms. So did bulls, and shipwreck if they gored. Owls and other night birds meant storm or pirate attack, gulls and other sea birds danger but not death. To dream that you saw your face on the moon meant destruction, to dream of flying on your back or walking on water were good omens. In general, encouraging dreams seems to have been far fewer than the other kind.

Omens were not limited to embarkation only; they were equally operative under way. For example, the dreams just listed meant the same whether they came to one in a waterfront inn or under a shelter on deck. Birds settling in the rigging during a voyage was a good sign; it meant land was near, and a skipper who had lost his bearings often found his way by following the flight of a bird. So long as the weather was good, there was to be no cutting of hair or nails; if it turned bad, nail clippings and locks could be tossed to the waves as an appeasement offering. No blasphemies were allowed; it was bad even if they were merely in a letter received on board. Dancing was taboo. If anyone died during a voyage, the body was immediately cast into the sea, since death aboard a ship was the worst possible omen.

Passengers amused themselves as best they could. They had each other for company, and big ships, such as the ones that plied between Rome and Alexandria, could accommodate no small number. Josephus once crossed to Rome on a vessel carrying 600. People of importance were given a chair on the poop where they could chat with the skipper—the equivalent, as it were, of eating at the captain's table on a modern transatlantic liner. Reading to pass the time was for those who could afford books, which, being handwritten, were far from cheap; travellers preferred the parchment codex editions, much like a modern book in form, to scrolls, which not only were bulkier (there was writing on only one side of the sheet)

but also less convenient since they had to be held with both hands at all times. Almost certainly gambling must have helped while away many a long hour. There was always the handling of the ship to watch: the helmsman guiding her, not as today by spinning a wheel which controls a rudder at the stern, but by pushing or pulling on tiller bars socketed into enormous steering oars on each quarter (Fig. 6), an apparatus every bit as efficient as a stern rudder; the sailors trimming the lines of the huge mainsail or the triangular topsail or little foresail; the hands in the hold getting rid of bilgewater by bailing with buckets or working a pump; the hands on the afterdeck hauling in the ship's boat, which was towed astern, to pass some rations to the lonely sailor who stood watch there; the ship's carpenter on the foredeck (Fig. 6) fashioning spare oars, shells for blocks, belaying pins, and what not; in short, all the miscellaneous chores that go on day in and day out aboard sailing ships no matter what age they belong to. There was no problem about keeping occupied when trouble was in the offing. Then everybody aboard, passengers as well as crew, were put to work. When a storm hit St Paul's ship, he and the other passengers helped jettison the tackle. In any blow, the yard, an enormous spar which could be almost as long as the vessel itself, had to be lowered to the deck and either secured properly or cast adrift, a job that needed all the muscle aboard. Later, when the danger grew even worse, Paul and the others pitched in to help dump the cargo of grain. The alternative to keeping the ship afloat was death, since ancient vessels carried no lifeboats; the ship's boat, which might accommodate a dozen people at best, was for harbour service not saving lives.

As the vessel sailed into its port of destination, the captain gratefully performed a sacrifice on the poop (Fig. 6). A harbour tug—a heavy dory manned by husky rowers pulling extra-long oars—came out and, taking a line from the ship, got it under tow, brought it up to a dock nose first, and here it was securely moored to a huge stone ring on the quay. The

gangplank was lowered, stevedores swarmed aboard to start unloading the cargo, and the passengers with a sigh of relief walked down to terra firma. A sigh of relief because, among other things, the tension had been greater than ever from the moment the harbour had been sighted: from then on it was of crucial importance that no one utter any word, or commit any act, of ill omen.

The comfort and speed of a sea voyage depended upon the ship—and ancient ships, like modern, ran the gamut from lordly long-distance freighters to humble local coasting craft.

When the Jewish princeling Agrippa was planning to leave Rome for Palestine, the emperor Caligula advised him not to take the coastal route: 'from Brindisi to Syria, which was long and tiring but, waiting for the Etesian winds, to take a direct sailing to Alexandria'. He added that, 'the ships are crack sailing craft and their skippers the most experienced there are; they drive their vessels like race horses on an unswerving course that goes straight as a die'. Caligula was referring to the mighty ships that plied between Alexandria and Rome bringing Egyptian grain to feed the capital. By a lucky coincidence, we happen to know what they looked like. One day about the middle of the second century A.D., one of them ran into a particularly bad stretch of weather, was blown far off course, and ended up in the Piraeus, Athens' port. The arrival of a unit from the famous grain fleet in what was at this time a commercial backwater created a sensation. Everybody in town turned out to see it including, fortunately for us, Lucian. He and his friends walked the five miles from Athens to the waterfront to get a look at what was causing all the excitement. He was astonished. He wrote:

What a size the ship was! 180 feet in length, the ship's carpenter told me, the beam more than a quarter of that, and 44 feet from the deck to the lowest point in the hold. And the height of the mast, and what a yard it carried, and what a forestay held it up! And the way the stern rose up in a

gradual curve ending in a gilded goose-head, matched at the other end by the forward, more flattened, sweep of the prow with its figures of Isis, the goddess the ship was named after, on each side! Everything was incredible: the rest of the decoration, the paintings, the red topsail, even more, the anchors with their capstans and winches, and the cabins aft. The crew was like an army. They told me she carried enough grain to feed every mouth in Athens for a year. And it all depended for its safety on one little old man who turns those great steering oars with a tiller that's no more than a stick! They pointed him out to me; woolly-haired little fellow, half-bald. Heron was his name, I think.

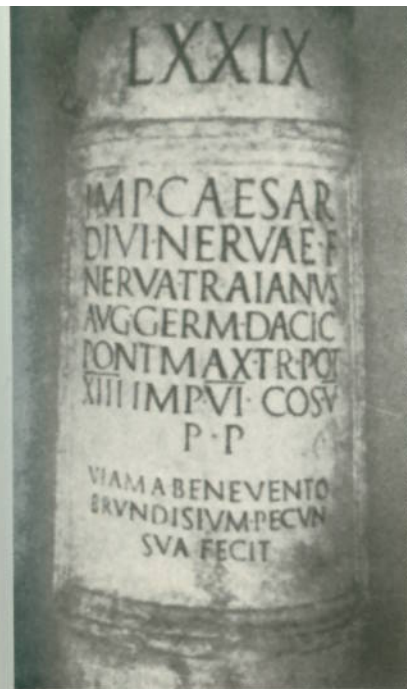
More than 180 feet long, more than 45 wide, with a hold 44 feet deep—it *was* a mighty vessel, probably able to hold over a thousand tons of grain, or three times as much cargo as any merchantman that plied between Europe and America before 1820. And probably able, too, to squeeze aboard a thousand passengers. 'And we were in all in the ship two hundred three score and sixteen souls', said Luke of the vessel used on the same run that he boarded with Paul at Myra, and that was during an off-season sailing.

The *Isis* represents one end of the scale, the queens of the Roman merchant marine, the biggest and finest vessels a voyager could book passage on. It is not surprising that the emperor Vespasian preferred them to the naval galleys available to him. At the other end of the scale were the modest vessels that tramped along the coast. And we have some idea of what these were like thanks to a description by Synesius. This aristocratic Greek intellectual, who was converted to Christianity and eventually became Bishop of Ptolemais, took one in A.D. 404 to go from Alexandria along the Egyptian and Libyan coast to Cyrene and wrote up his experiences in a lively, chatty letter to his brother back in Alexandria. Though we must take a good deal of what he relates with a large pinch of salt—Synesius is as much interested in entertaining the

reader as in informing him—it provides an amusing and illuminating picture of what a trip on one of these humble craft was like:

Our shipowner was being crushed to death by a load of debt. There were twelve in the crew all told, with the captain making thirteen. Over half were Jews, including the captain, a race of non-conformists who are persuaded that piety consists in arranging to kill as many Greeks as possible. The rest were ordinary farm boys who up to last year had never touched an oar. The one thing they all shared in common was having some bodily defect. And so, so long as we were in no danger, they made jokes about this and called each other by their misfortunes instead of their real names—Cripple, Ruptured, One-Arm, Squint; each and every one had his nickname. All this rather amused us. But, in time of need, it was no laughing matter; we had reason to groan over these very defects, since there were more than fifty passengers, about one-third of them women and mostly young and pretty. Don't be envious: a curtain walled us off, a good strong one, a piece of sail that had recently ripped, a veritable wall of Semiramis in the eyes of decent temperate men. And even Priapus himself would have been decent and temperate if he had been a passenger on Mr Amaranthus' ship. There wasn't a moment when he let us relax from the fear of mortal danger.

To start with, after rounding [the cape] near you with the temple of Poseidon, he decided to make straight for Taposiris with all sail flying and take a try at Scylla, the one in the story books we get so scared at. When we realized this and, a hair's breadth from disaster, let out a shout, we just managed to force him to give up doing battle with the rocks. Then, spinning the vessel about as if having a change of mind, off he went for the open water, for a while struggling against the sea as best he could but later helped along by a good breeze from the south.



Appia Traiana, the extension of the Via Appia from Benevento to Brindisi built by Trajan. The inscription reads: IMP(erator) CAESAR DIVI NERVAE F(ilius) NERVA TRAIANUS AUG(ustus) GERM(anicus) DACIC(us) PONT(ifex) MAX(imus) TR(ibunicia) POT(estas) XIII IMP(erator) VI CO(n)S(ul) V P(ater) P(atriciae) VIAMA BENEVENTO BRUNDISIUM PECUN(ia) SUA FECIT 'The Emperor Caesar Nerva Trajan, son of the Divinized Nerva, Augustus, Victor in Germany, Victor in Dacia, Pontifex Maximus, holding the tribunician power for the thirteenth time [i.e. in 108 A.D.], Imperator for the sixth time, Consul for the fifth, Father of the Fatherland, built the road from Beneventum to Brundisium at his own expense.'

11 Roman wagon of the early second century A.D. drawn by a mule. It is a relatively unusual type being fitted with shafts for a single animal instead of a draught-pole for a team.



Had Synesius known anything about the handling of a sailing ship, he would have realized what was happening. The skipper had started with a long tack landward, extending it just as far as he possibly could, as a good skipper will. He then 'spun the vessel about'—but not because of any change of mind; he simply wore ship to go on the opposite tack, where, as even Synesius became aware, he was helped along by the offshore wind. As he extended this tack, he left the shore further and further behind, and Synesius, suspicious of the crew's competence and getting more and more nervous, began to complain bitterly. Amarantus patiently explained what was going on, but Synesius remained only half convinced.

Toward evening, the wind started to make up and by midnight they had run into a storm:

The men groaned, the women shrieked, everybody called upon god, cried aloud, remembered their dear ones. Only Amarantus was in good spirits, thinking he was going to get out of paying his creditors. . . . I noticed that the soldiers [a large group of the passengers were members of an Arab cavalry unit] had all drawn their swords. I asked why and learned that they preferred to belch up their souls to the open air, on the deck, rather than gurgle them up to the sea. True descendants of Homer, I thought, and approved of the idea. Then someone called out that all who had any gold should hang it around their neck. Those who had, did so, both gold and anything else of the value of gold. The women not only put on their jewellery but handed out pieces of string to any who needed them. This is a time-honoured practice, and the reason for it is this: you must provide the corpse of someone lost at sea with the money to pay for a funeral so that whoever recovers it, profiting by it, won't mind giving it a little attention. . . .

The ship was rushing along under full canvas because we couldn't shorten sail. Time and again we laid hands on the lines but gave up because they were jammed in the blocks.

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12 Roman covered wagon, perhaps a *carruca dormitoria*, of the Imperial period.

13 Gravestone of the second to third century A.D. showing a dispatch carrier of the Roman *cursus publicus* in a light carriage. See page 183.





And secretly we began to be equally afraid that, even if we escaped from the raging sea, we would be approaching land in the dead of night in this helpless condition. Day broke before this happened, and we saw the sun—and never with greater pleasure. As the heat of day came on, the wind moderated, and, with the wetness out of the ropes, we were able to use them and handle sail. To replace with a stormsail was impossible—it was in the pawn shop. We took the sail in like the folds of a tunic, and within four hours, we, who had been expecting death, find ourselves disembarking in a remote deserted spot with not a town nor farm nearby for fifteen miles around. The ship was tossing in the open roads (for the spot was no harbour), held by one anchor—the second anchor had been sold, and Mr Amarantus did not own a third. When we touched beloved land, we embraced it like a living mother.

## II

## On the Road

To travel by land was more time-consuming than by water and infinitely more tiring but, as we saw earlier, there were compensations. For one, storms were rarely a matter of life and death. For another, the season of the year did not have to make a difference. There was no obstacle to starting a trip at any time along the major roads ringing the Mediterranean. Even in mountainous areas travel was merely reduced during the winter months; only periods of heavy snowfall brought it to a complete halt.

A trip by land might involve more baggage than by sea. In addition to the inevitable kitchenware and tableware, towels, bedding, and the like, the traveller probably had to have more changes of clothing, as well as special wear adapted to the rigours of the road: heavy shoes or heavy sandals, broad-brimmed hat (cf. 75 above), and a selection of capes (cf. Fig. 13)—a short light one for milder weather (the Greek *chlamys* or the Roman *lacerna*), another for rainy days (e.g. the Roman *paenula*, made of wool or leather, fitted with a hood, and reaching to the knees), still another for cold days (e.g. the *birrus*, a long wool garment with hood, rather like an Arab burnous). Money and valuables were carried in a purse on a belt about the waist (*zona*) or in a little bag on a cord about the neck (*crumena*, *ballantion*). Travellers who insisted on knowing the time could equip themselves with a pocket sundial, a little round gadget of bronze (the specimens that have been found range from  $1\frac{3}{8}$  to  $2\frac{3}{8}$  inches in diameter);

some were designed for use anywhere in the Roman Empire, others in limited areas. Women on the road wore more or less the same clothes as men, though of greater length, reaching to the ankles. If they took along jewellery, they kept it out of sight. 'Bring your gold jewellery with you, but don't wear it!' cautions a soldier writing to his wife who was to join him at his station.

We happen to have—they were by great good fortune unearthed in Egypt—the account books kept by a high Roman official named Theophanes during a trip he made from upper Egypt to Antioch sometime between A.D. 317 and 323. Theophanes took along practically a miniature household. The inventory of his clothing lists three types of tunic (light, ordinary, sleeved), light and heavy capes, various mantles and hoods, a rain-wrap, light felt shoes as well as heavy sandals, numerous changes of underwear, and several pairs of riding breeches. Then there was the kitchen equipment: cooking utensils, tableware, napkins; also oil lamps, both standing and hanging. For washing and bathing he carried olive oil, alum, and natron (a natural compound of sodium carbonate and sodium bicarbonate abundant in Egypt), and myrrh as an after-washing lotion, and a supply of wash-cloths, hand towels, face towels, and bath towels. For sleeping he had mattresses, sheets, blankets, pillows, rugs, and a selection of cushions.

Since a traveller put up with friends or family wherever he could, inevitably there were gifts or things they had requested to cram into the bags. 'When you come,' the soldier mentioned above instructs his wife, 'bring ten wool fleeces, six jars of olives, four jars of honey, my shield—just the new one—and my helmet. Bring my lances too. And bring the fittings for my tent.' Luckily for the poor lady, the projected trip was down the Nile and would be done comfortably by boat. If a traveller was heading for areas where inns were few and poorly stocked, he had to make room for food and drink on top of everything else. Theophanes' party, for example, when crossing the desert between Palestine and Egypt laid in extra supplies of

bread, eggs, and wine; the wine alone amounted to 150 litres or more. More baggage inevitably meant more servants to oversee, pack, and unpack it; Theophanes had so many that their upkeep accounted for well-nigh a third of his daily expenditures.

In Italy or along the great routes that linked major centres the roads were good enough to permit hauling baggage in carts or wagons as well as on pack-animals, which in the Near East now included camels (cf. 54 below), in addition to the ubiquitous donkeys and mules. Off the main roads pack-animals or porters were the rule, with porters favoured over animals in mountainous or heavily forested areas.

As the date for departure approached, the superstitious anxiously thought over their dreams. For a journey by land, no less than by sea, was subject to the proper omens. To dream of quail presaged being tricked or meeting bandits en route, owls meant meeting storms or bandits, wild boars meant meeting storms. A gazelle foretold an easy or hard trip, depending on its physical condition. Donkeys meant a safe trip but slow. Garlands of narcissi or marshes were bad omens, clear bright air or stars good. Certain gods, such as Hermes or Aphrodite, augured a good journey, others, such as the Dioscuri or Dionysus, a bad one. A dream in which statues of the gods seemed to move was favourable.

If his dreams were favourable, or if he was not the kind to take such things seriously, the voyager proceeded to get himself and his baggage from house or inn to a convenient town gate. Since in many cities wheeled traffic was not allowed to circulate within the walls during daylight hours (263 below), this could mean leading a parade of servants and hired bearers or pack animals, all loaded down with gear. Those who had the money were able to rent litters or sedan chairs to carry themselves and whoever went along with them.

Once at the city gate, the voyager had several possibilities to ponder over. If he was alone he might choose to go on

foot—if poor, he had no alternative—trudging stolidly on his way; along some of the very first-class Roman roads there were pavements to accommodate such traffic. En route he might hitch an occasional ride on a ponderous *plaustrum*, a farm or work wagon. These were hauled at a snail's pace by a team of oxen and announced their coming from afar by the tortured creaking of their wheels; the only lubricants available, dregs of olive pressings or animal fat, were too expensive to be used very liberally. For those who could afford to hire a carriage, there were livery stables conveniently located at the city gates and offering a wide range of choice. Couples or single persons with little baggage might take a *birota*, a two-wheeled passenger cart (Fig. 15), perhaps an *essedum*, large and elaborate and therefore preferred by the emperors and their like, perhaps a *covinnus* or a *cisium*, both of which were lighter and simpler and hence a much commoner sight on the roads. All were almost always pulled not by one but by a pair of horses or fast-stepping mules, for reasons to be explained in a moment. They accommodated two to three passengers. A larger party, or anyone following a route that led over slow secondary roads, would hire a *reda* (Fig. 13), a robust open four-wheeled wagon drawn by one or two pairs of mules. The *covinnus* was so light and handy, it could be driven by one of the passengers; other carts and wagons had not only a driver (*mulio*) but a man at the bridle (*cursor*) who led the animals along at a swift walking pace (cf. Fig. 15). More comfortable and better suited for family travel was the *carruca*, the Roman descendant of the age-old covered wagon (25 above) with an arched leather or cloth canopy (Fig. 12); certain types were fitted for sleeping (*carruca dormitoria*). People of wealth, particularly ladies of the court, frequently used the *carpentum*. This was a heavy two-wheeled de luxe carriage with a substantial roof supported by ornamental columns; the sides could be closed off with draw curtains, often gaily decorated, often of expensive fabrics such as silk. The differences between a homely *reda* and an elegant *carpentum* were solely for the

eyes of the beholders; their riding qualities were the same. Both had wooden wheels with iron tyres and were innocent of springs; the occupants jounced along feeling every bump in the road. The way to avoid such discomfort was to go in a litter (*lectica*) rather than a carriage; there was no longer any prejudice against them (67 above), and they were also available for hire at the city gates. The travelling litter consisted of a couch fitted with canopy and draw curtains; the rider lolled at his ease as six or eight husky slaves bore it along on their shoulders. For long journeys, the men could be replaced by a pair of mules harnessed to the carrying poles, one ahead and one behind. A bearer-borne litter was the most painless way of travelling, but inevitably the slowest.

The emperors and others of high society or of wealth took to the road in the grandest imaginable style. They packed a veritable household to spare them the ignominy or discomfort of stopping at any inns save those able to accommodate a royal party: tents and commodes as well as the usual cooking utensils, bedding, and tableware; some of the last could be so precious and fragile it had to be carried by hand and not trusted to a jolting wagon. An army of attendants was *de rigueur*. Horace ridicules one Roman worthy who, for the short trip from Rome to his villa at Tibur, took along no less than five slaves, even though he was so tight-fisted that the only gear they were called on to handle were the two items he refused to be without—wine jug and commode. A lavish spender's entourage could include not merely the customary maids, valets, chefs, scullions, and so on, but exotic Moors and Numidians in eye-catching costumes to run ahead and make sure no traffic encumbered the way, or mincing pages with their faces masked so that the sun or cold would not hurt their delicate complexions. Matched teams of mules or horses, covered with embroidered or purple cloths and fitted with gilded trappings, pulled the vehicles, which were themselves gorgeous affairs adorned with gold and silver statuary and upholstered in silk. The emperor Claudius, who liked to play

dice, had a travelling carriage fitted as a gaming room. Commodus had one with seats that swivelled, so that he could adjust them to catch the sun in cool weather or a breeze in hot, and others rigged with a gadget that recorded the miles covered. The Elder Pliny, a compulsive writer, always made room for a stenographer who had pen and tablets at the ready.

Some travellers went on muleback or on a slow-gaited cob, with their servants trudging in their wake. Few rode fast saddle horses, since horses, as in times past (52 above), were chiefly for cavalrymen, hunters, or dispatch-riders. Expense was one, but not the only, reason for this. Riding a horse in ancient times, particularly for long distances, was a wearisome business: stirrups were unknown—this crucial piece of equipment did not come into use in Europe until the ninth century A.D.—and saddles were rudimentary, often consisting of little more than a cloth on the horse's back. In fact, as we noted earlier (24 above), the ancients never realized the full potentiality of the horse either as mount or draught animal. As mount they limited its usefulness not only by riding without stirrups or a proper saddle but also by leaving it unshod; they did have certain sandal-like devices of metal, leather, or straw, which slipped over the hoof, but these, made for mules and camels as well as horses, apparently were only temporary expedients for special circumstances, to protect a sore hoof or to provide a grip on slippery ground. The iron horseshoe fastened permanently with nails found general acceptance only from the eighth century A.D. on. And, as draught animal, the ancients insisted on putting it in a harness basically designed for oxen, setting a pair of horses on either side of a draught-pole, and harnessing them by means of a breast-band to a yoke at the front end (Figs. 12, 13, 15). The breast-band had an unfortunate tendency to slide up the throat and press on the windpipe; the harder the pull, the greater the choking effect. The padded horse-collar, which made the point of pressure the shoulders instead of the neck, did not come into being until the Middle Ages. From the

beginning of the second century A.D. on, there are examples of wagons fitted with shafts (Fig. 11), which permitted the use of a single horse instead of a pair, but it seems to have found limited acceptance despite its advantages of cheapness and convenience, particularly on narrow country roads.

The voyager, having picked a conveyance or riding and pack animals, having loaded up and got under way, next faced the problem of where to stop for the night, and, if he was travelling with hired gear, where to find a change of animals and equipment. As it happened, his choices were often determined by the network of inns and hostels that belonged to the *cursus publicus*, the government post.

Rome's *cursus publicus* was created by Augustus, but the idea of such a service was hardly original with him; it is an essential tool for any government that rules extended areas. The earliest examples we know of go back to the third millennium B.C., when the city-states of Mesopotamia first began to build miniature empires (36 above). Five centuries before Augustus' day the Persians were using the highly developed service that Herodotus admired so (53 above); on the other side of Asia, at just about the same time, China's Chou dynasty had built up an equally efficient system. And, by the third century B.C., China's Han dynasty and the super-centralized administration that the Ptolemies had set up in Egypt were running the nearest thing to a modern postal system that the ancient world was to know. The carriers were all mounted. In China the post-stations were some eleven miles apart, with two or more substations in between. In Egypt they were sparser, at intervals of six hours by horseback or roughly thirty miles apart. Some records of one of these Egyptian post offices have been dug up by the archeologists, so we have a fair idea of the way they worked. Thanks to Egypt's geography, mail had to go only north and south, along the ribbon of inhabited land bordering the Nile. The offices handled at least four deliveries daily, two from each

direction. For packages and other heavier matter there was an auxiliary camel-back service.

When Augustus conquered and annexed Egypt in 30 B.C., the system was right at hand to serve as a model. He, however, was interested neither in speed nor regular delivery. What he sought was a facility which would forward dispatches when necessary and permit him to interrogate the carriers as well as read the papers they brought. So he fashioned a service in which there were no relays: each messenger went himself the whole route, and since time was not of the essence, travelled in carriages rather than on horseback. As the system developed, the couriers were more and more drawn from the army, especially from the elite unit called *speculatores* 'scouts'; instead of scouting the situation of an enemy, they scouted, as it were, the situation at the headquarters they were delivering to. A gravestone of a *speculator* has survived which bears a relief picturing the deceased in the course of his duties (Fig. 13). We see a *reda*, an open four-wheeled carriage, drawn by three horses, two in the yoke and a trace-horse. On the box is a driver who, plying the whip, keeps the team stepping smartly along. On a bench behind is the courier wearing a hooded travelling cloak and holding what seems to be a riding crop. Behind him, facing rearward, is his servant, who sits on the baggage and clutches a lance with a distinctive head, a special insignia of office showing that his master was attached to the staff of the local governor.

In Egypt the Romans may well have maintained the Ptolemies' mail service, since it was so feasible a system there. But everywhere else the Roman post operated as Augustus had designed it, making sporadic deliveries according to need—or rather the emperor's need, since officially only men carrying dispatches from him or for him were entitled to the privileges of the *cursus publicus*. Every user had to have a *diploma*, as a post warrant was called, signed by the emperor or, in his absence, his authorized agent; governors of provinces could also issue them, but they disposed of a limited number

only, rationed out by the emperor. A *diploma*, entitling one to travel with the use of government maintained facilities, was a prized possession, and inevitably some fell into hands which did not deserve them (188 below). When the emperor Otho was defeated in battle in A.D. 69, with the inevitable consequence that warrants bearing his name would no longer be honoured, an interested party hushed up the news and spread word of a victory in order to keep the precious documents alive.

At the beginning of the third century A.D., Septimius Severus altered the system radically: he added the *cursus clabularis*, a transport service charged with the duty of purveying provisions for the army. Overnight the organization swelled in size and became more complicated. The administrative staff had to be expanded, there was more intensive use of all facilities, there had to be an increase in the size and number of the post stations, and wagons and heavy duty draught animals had to be added to the couriers' light carriages and fast-stepping teams. The *diploma* now took two forms, the partial warrant (*evectio*) which authorized transport only, and the full (*tractoria*) authorizing both transport and subsistence.

We know the operations of the *cursus* best in the fully developed form it achieved by the second half of the fourth century A.D., when it had long been in use as a transport as well as dispatch service. All along the routes at strategic intervals were more or less well-equipped inns (201 below) called *mansiones* or *stationes*; the first term originally applied to places with the facilities to handle an imperial party, the second to posts maintained by the road police, but by this time the two had gradually merged. In between the *mansiones* or *stationes* were very simple hostels (202 below), *mutationes* 'changing places' as they were sometimes called, which could supply the minimum of a traveller's needs—a bite to eat, a bed, and, as the name implies, a change of beasts or vehicle. The distance from one *mansio* to the next depended on the terrain and how thickly an area was populated, but in general

an effort was made to keep them twenty-five to thirty-five miles apart, that is, the length of an average day's travel. In densely settled districts, such as around the capital, they tended to be a good deal closer. There might be one or two hostels between a pair of *mansiones*, again depending on the terrain. For example, a traveller setting out from Aquileia at the head of the Adriatic to cross the Alps into Yugoslavia, which was the main route from northern Italy to the east, came to a simple hostel at eleven miles, a second one twelve miles further on, and then, after another twelve miles to make thirty-five in all, arrived at an inn (*mansio*). Next day he climbed twelve miles to the top of the pass, where he found a hostel, and then ten miles down the other side to an inn.

The inns varied widely in the range and quality of what they could provide, from the so-called *praetoria* with accommodations to put up a royal party down to modest establishments that were but a cut above the hostels. A fully equipped inn offered practically everything a traveller might possibly need: meals and sleeping quarters; change of clothing for the drivers and postilions; change of animals (big stations stabled as many as forty horses or mules), carriages, and drivers (*muliones*); grooms (*stratores*); escorts for bringing back vehicles and teams to the previous station (*hippocomi*); porters (*bastagarii*, *catabolenses*); veterinarians (*mulomedici*) to put to rights animals in trouble; cartwrights (*carpentarii*) to put to rights equipment in trouble.

The inns and hostels of the *cursus publicus* were not built specifically for it, nor did they service only those travelling on official business, although these had an ironclad priority. The post, despite the fact that it was run wholly for the benefit of the central government, was largely maintained by the communities along the routes. The emperors simply selected given existing inns of the required quality and incorporated them into the system, requiring them to put up without charge any holder of a *diploma* who came along. Only in remote areas, as on mountain passes or along lonely tracts of road, did they

have to build from scratch (202 below); such places, too, to help meet expenses put up all voyagers, private as well as official. Vehicles, animals, drivers, stablehands—all were requisitioned, wherever possible, from local citizens. With the passage of time these found the upkeep of the post a galling burden, since its demands grew steadily, not merely the legitimate demands but those of unscrupulous officials who would arbitrarily seize horses and equipment or barefacedly bed down unauthorized travellers in the inns. Every now and then, the emperors tried to do something about the situation. Severus, for example, shifted a good part of the costs to the government treasury; by Constantine's time, however, all expense was again on the backs of the locals. Emperor after emperor enacted stringent laws to eliminate abuses and to keep the service up to the mark. There were regulations governing the number of wagons or animals that could be requisitioned, the size of the wagons, maximum permissible loads, numbers of drivers to be used, routes to be followed, weight of saddles and saddlebags, even the size and nature of the whips. One regulation stated that 'no person shall remunerate any driver, cartwright, or veterinarian employed on the public post, since . . . they obtain subsistence allowances and clothing, which is believed sufficient for them'—in other words, no tipping allowed. Rarely have no-tipping rules been made to work, and all signs indicate that neither it nor very many of the other well-meaning statutes on the books were adequately enforced.

Anyone using the *cursus publicus* had to know exactly where the various inns and hostels belonging to it were located. Handlists called *itineraria* were available, which detailed for a given route the stopping places along it and how far each was from the next. There were also maps designed specifically to show not only the location of such places but what they had to offer. By good fortune a copy made in the Middle Ages of one of these has survived, the so-called Tabula Peutingeriana (Fig. 14). Done on an elon-

gated piece of parchment that is no more than thirteen inches wide but over twenty-two feet long, it presents a map of the Roman empire as distorted as if seen in a trick mirror. This was done on purpose: the cartographer's sole aim was to give a schematic picture of the Roman road system in a form suitable for ready reference. He put in just about the same information we find on a modern automobile map: lines showing routes; names of cities, towns, and other stopping places; numbers indicating the distance in Roman miles between them. In addition and most interesting, alongside many of the names there stands a little coloured picture-symbol. These serve the same purpose as the surprisingly similar symbols used in the *Guide Michelin* or other modern guide books, to show at a quick glance the nature of the facilities available for spending a night. A schematized picture of a four-sided building with a court in the centre stands for a town or country inn of some consequence, one that could offer a considerable range of services. A picture of the front of a house with a twin-peaked roof stands for a less pretentious country inn. Twin cupolas instead of peaks means the same grade of inn but with ample water available. A single-peaked boxlike cottage stands for a very modest inn. Names with no picture alongside probably indicate the simplest form of hostel, places that could furnish little more than water, shelter, a bare meal, and a fresh relay of animals. For example, a traveller leaving Rome by the Via Aurelia, which ran north along the west coast, could see by the map (cf. Fig. 14) that his first convenient stopping place would be Alsium, eighteen miles from the capital, with minimum facilities (no picture) and that from here it was ten miles to Pyrgi, with minimum facilities; then six miles to Punicum, with minimum facilities but close to Aquae Apollinares, with first-rate facilities (four-sided building); then nine miles to Castrum Novum, with quite good facilities (twin-peaked building); then four miles to Aquae Tauri, with the same facilities as Aquae Apollinares, and so on.

Government couriers hustled along from station to station at an average of five miles an hour for a total of fifty miles in a normal day's travelling. Thus, a dispatch from Rome would reach Brindisi in about seven days, Byzantium (where Constantinople was later founded) in about twenty-five, Antioch in about forty, Alexandria in about fifty-five. During emergencies, travelling night and day, they could treble this speed. When the legions mutinied at Mainz on the Rhine in A.D. 69, the news reached Rome in some eight or nine days; the messenger had averaged better than 150 miles per day.

The traveller charged with government business, and hence with the facilities of the *cursus publicus* at his disposal, had few problems: he would present his *diploma* to the nearest authorized inn and be issued an appropriate conveyance. He would consult his handlist or map for the stopping places available along his route, and at these he would eat, sleep, and pick up changes of animals and equipment until he reached his destination. Private voyagers were officially barred from the *cursus publicus*, but, human nature being what it is, exceptions were inevitable. 'My lord,' wrote Pliny, governor of a province in the north of Asia Minor in A.D. 109-111, to the emperor Trajan, 'up to this moment, I have never accommodated anyone with a *diploma*. . . . However, my wife heard that her grandfather died, and since she wanted to run to see her aunt, I thought it unnecessarily severe to deny her the use of a *diploma*'. Libanius, scion of one of Antioch's leading families, arriving at Constantinople in A.D. 336 with his own mules exhausted, was chagrined to discover that 'the man I had hopes would send me on to Athens with a team from the Imperial Post . . . had fallen from power, and . . . , said he, this was the one thing he could not do'. The aristocrat Sidonius Apollinaris, who went from his home town in southern France to Rome in A.D. 467, reports that, as soon as he emerged from the town gate, he 'found the government post at my disposal, like someone summoned by a letter from

the emperor'. These cases involve the time-honoured relaxing of the rules in favour of the highly placed; more serious and frequent were the cases involving political influence, bribery, even the blatant sale of post warrants. The regulations on the books against unauthorized use of the *cursus publicus* steadily increased, the penalties became stiffer (selling a *diploma* was punishable by death), but how effectively they were enforced is an open question.

The private voyager who had no access, legitimate or illegitimate, to the government post would still find himself putting up at inns and hostels that formed part of the network, because in many areas they were the only ones available and elsewhere were presumably the best. Moreover, if not travelling in a carriage or with animals of his own, he would find himself applying to them for what was available for hire. Along the open road, if he reached a station just after an official party had come through and had requisitioned everything in sight, he had no alternative except to wait. In any event, he inevitably moved along more slowly than the government couriers. In normal terrain, with no toilsome slopes to negotiate, he did about fifteen to twenty miles a day on foot, some twenty-five to thirty in a carriage. Forty, even forty-five, was possible but it meant an exhaustingly long and hard day's travel. The stopping places along the open roads were spaced to accommodate such speeds. For example, an itinerary of the fourth century A.D., prepared for use by pilgrims going from Bordeaux to Jerusalem, lists for the stretch of sixty-two Roman miles from Toulouse to Carcassonne: nine miles to a *mutatio* (hostel) at Nonum, then eleven miles to a *mutatio* (hostel) at Vicesimum, then nine miles to a *mansio* (inn) at Elusione, then nine miles to a *mutatio* at Sostomagus, then ten miles to Vicus Hebromago (a village), then six miles to a *mutatio* at Cedros, then eight miles to Carcassonne. Carriages, in other words, were expected to do the trip in two days, covering twenty-nine miles the first to spend the night at Elusione, and thirty-three the next. The *mutationes*, the



modest roadhouses in between, were set eight to ten miles apart on the average. In difficult terrain, as we would expect, the stopping places were closer together. Between Arles and Milan, for example, a journey that included crossing the Alps, the average distance between them diminished to six miles.

To get some idea of what it was like to journey along the roads during Roman times, of what were the traveller's day to day experiences, let us follow three very different men making very different kinds of trips. The first is the Roman administrator Theophanes, mentioned several times above, who was sped by the government post on official business from upper Egypt to Antioch and back. The second is the Greek intellectual Aristides, a private citizen travelling on his own along more or less back-country ways in Asia Minor. The third is the poet Horace, who accompanied one of Augustus' great ministers of state down the Appian Way in the days before Augustus had brought the government post into existence.

On 12 April in one of the years between A.D. 317 and 323, Theophanes left Pelusium (not far from the modern Port Said) on the edge of Egypt proper. He was accompanied by at least two subordinate officials, a steward, a clerk, and a host of servants. We have, as it were, a worm's eye view of his trip, one derived not from a formal description but from some preserved pages of the ledger in which his clerks recorded the points reached and the daily expenses incurred at each. Since nowhere are there entries for lodgings or the hire of animals, it is clear that Theophanes and his party were enjoying the privileges of the public post. On the other hand, his daily outlays for food show that he did not have a courier's full warrant, but one that authorized only transport and lodging.

Details are lacking for the voyage out, and about all we can do is reconstruct his itinerary and speed. The party took four days to plod across the desert between Egypt and Palestine,

never doing more than twenty-six miles in a day and one day doing as little as sixteen. Once in the land of milk and honey, however, they stepped up the pace sharply to average forty a day for six days, which brought them right to Tyre. Here they let up a bit, averaging under thirty a day for the next eight days to Laodicea. From Laodicea to the final destination at Antioch was a good sixty-four miles but, like horses smelling the stable, they reeled it all off in a single day, arriving on 30 April. The trip had taken eighteen days in all.

On 19 July Theophanes readied his party for the return. A load of food supplies was purchased in anticipation for departure the next morning: fine bread for Theophanes and the others who shared his table, cheap bread for the servants, jars of local wine, 2 lb. and 1 oz. of beef or veal for the master's dinner, fruit (grapes, apricots, watermelon), cabbage, olive oil, the special strong flavoring sauce called garum, honey for sweetening, and wood for the cooking fire. The following day, after adding a purchase of sausages and apples, the party got under way; probably it was late in the morning, since they stopped for the night at some village only fourteen miles along. On the 21st, however, they put all of fifty miles behind them to reach Laodicea. Theophanes must have had business here because they stayed in town all of the 22nd, using some of the time to lay in more supplies: the usual two grades of bread, 1 lb. 6 oz. of beef for the master's dinner, and more fruits and wine. Theophanes was particular about his wine: at Laodicea the pint he had for his lunch cost him almost as much as all the vin ordinaire he bought for his squad of servants.

On the 23rd they were back on the road and by the 25th were in Byblos, having covered a respectable 140 miles in three days. Our connoisseur must have treated himself to a particularly good wine here, since the ledger records an expenditure for snow, which must have come from the heights of the Lebanon that rears up behind the city, to cool it. This luxury was not very expensive, considering the trouble it

took to get it; the wine for dinner cost 700 drachmas, the snow only 100. They came to Beirut, twenty-four miles further on, on the 26th, where they were able to lay in a variety of fruits (grapes, figs, peaches, apricots) and re-stock on cleaning materials (natron, bath oil, soap). The next day's stop was Sidon, thirty-four miles along, and here eggs were bought in for the master's dinner (safer no doubt than meat in the height of summer). The entries for the following few days are fragmentary, and all we can do is trace the party's progress: thirty-six miles to Tyre on 28 July, forty-five to Ptolemais on the 29th, and forty-four to Caesarea on the 30th, with a stop for lunch at a *mutatio* on the way. The next day they also lunched at a *mutatio*, one that had an animal available to slaughter for them, since an entry records the purchase of 4 lb. 2 oz. of beef or veal here. They stopped for the night at Antipatris, having covered thirty-three miles. Lunch at Gebala the next day (1 August) included lamb and pork rather than beef or veal, and at a fraction the cost. By evening they had done the forty-three miles to Ascalon, where Theophanes had eggs for dinner and everyone enjoyed a wide variety of local fruits: peaches, plums, grapes, figs, apples. The second of August brought them thirty-nine miles to Raphia, where dinner was cheese and goat's meat, and the fruits melons, grapes, and mulberries. Another thirty-eight miles on 3 August and they were at Rhinocoloura, the jump-off point for the desert crossing. Here they stocked up. Theophanes had eggs for dinner, and laid in some extra for the following day. They bought in triple supplies of bread and, since the desert is a thirsty place, no less than 140 to 160 litres of the local wine. And the master prepared for the austerity ahead by treating himself and some guests at lunch to a wine that cost exactly one-half of what the 140 litres cost. At the desert hostel the next day (4 August) they were able to pick up some cheese for lunch and dinner and some grapes and water-melon for dessert, but the hostel they stopped at for lunch on 5 August apparently had nothing at all to offer. By nightfall they were

at Pelusium in Egypt and back, so to speak, in civilization. They celebrated by buying not only eggs and cheese but also dried fish, while some of the party had snails for lunch. And the next day, for the first time in the eighteen since leaving Antioch, they had fresh fish.

In the summer of A.D. 165 or perhaps a few years later, Aristides, a well-known public lecturer, was stricken by a fresh attack of illness after a span of fairly good health and decided to leave his sick bed at Smyrna and go to the famous sanctuary of Asclepius at Pergamon, where he had enjoyed some near miraculous recoveries before. He describes the trip in detail in one of his essays. The morning of the day of departure he had the baggage loaded on carts or wagons to be sent ahead with the servants and wait for him at Myrina, a town along the way. When the preparations had all finally been completed, it was noon and too hot for him to be out on the road. He waited around a few hours until the sun lost some of its bite, and about half past three in the afternoon he and his party got into their carriages and started off. By seven that evening, they had covered fourteen Roman miles and arrived at an inn a short distance from the point where the road crossed the river Hermus. He debated whether to pass the night there, but decided against it—there was no sign of his baggage, the inn was pretty bad, and, as darkness set in, a cool invigorating wind was springing up. They crossed the river and by about 10 P.M. had covered ten more miles to the next town, Larissa. The inn here was just as discouraging, still no sign of the baggage, so he was just as pleased to keep moving. By midnight or a little later he was at Cyme, only to find everything shut. Aristides again was not unhappy: the party had covered thirty-five miles, the cool evening had turned into a chilly night, all the others were begging for a halt, but he by now had the bit in his teeth, and there was no stopping him. About four in the morning they clattered wearily into Myrina—and there, sitting in front of one of the inns were the servants with

the baggage still all packed: they had arrived so late they found everything closed for the night. With forty-two miles behind them and no sleep for almost twenty-four hours, the whole party was dropping with fatigue. There was a pallet lying in the vestibule of the inn and they wasted time trying out places to set it, but to no avail, there was no getting comfortable on it. The only thing left to do was bang on likely doors; they did, but could not wake a soul. Finally they found a way to get into a friend's house—but the gate porter had let the fire go out, so they had to grope their way through in the dark. While a fire was being started, dawn broke. Aristides refused to let up at this point and waste the daylight in sleep; he roused the company and grimly made them push on. After stopping to offer sacrifice to Apollo at a sanctuary along the way, they finally bedded down at Elaea, twelve miles beyond Myrina. The following day they covered sixteen more to the final halt at Pergamon. It had been a gruelling grind for a well man, let alone one hurrying to a sanatorium.

In 38 or 37 B.C., the poet Horace travelled from Rome to Brindisi as member of an embassy headed by one of Augustus' great ministers, Maecenas. On his return, he wrote up his experiences in chatty, lighthearted verses. He set out with a friend—they were to meet up with the rest later—along the Appian way, most likely in a carriage. The first day they covered sixteen miles and stopped at Aricia at a 'modest inn', the second day twenty-seven to Forum Appii—'we divided into two days', remarks Horace, 'a journey that faster stepping travellers than ourselves make in one; the Via Appia is easier on those who don't take it in a hurry.' Forum Appii was 'full of boatmen and nasty tavern keepers', chiefly because of a barge service it offered: travellers could, toward evening, board a little barge there which, towed by a mule down a canal through the Pontine marshes, would bring them while they slept almost to Terracina, the next major stop, thereby

saving them a day on the road. At Appi Forum Horace's troubles started:

Because of the water, which was horrible, I declare my belly a public enemy and wait, not very happily, for my fellow travellers to finish dinner. When it was time to board, the sailors hollered at our servants, and our servants at them: 'This way with the boat! You're jamming three hundred people aboard—hey, that's enough!' By the time the fares are collected and the mule hitched up, a whole hour has been lost. Then there was no sleep for anyone, thanks to the murderous mosquitoes, the frogs in the swamp, and the sailor and one of the passengers—soused on stale wine, they were taking turns serenading absent girl-friends. Finally the passenger gets tired out and falls asleep, and our shiftless sailor unhitches the mule to let it graze, tethers it to a stone, stretches out on his back, and snores away. By now it's dawn, and we notice that the boat is standing still. A hothead jumps up, flails away at sailor and mule on flanks and head with a willow branch, and finally, about 10 A.M., we dock.

They stayed the night at Terracina; here they met up with Maecenas and the main body of the party, and Horace took a moment off to get some black salve for his eyes, which were bothering him. The next day brought them to Formiae, twenty-six miles further along, where a local aristocrat extended them the hospitality of his villa. The following morning a number of others including Vergil joined them, and the party was complete. The next day they did twenty-seven miles to a very simple inn for the night, and 'from there the mules put down their loads in Capua in good time. Maecenas goes off to play, Vergil and I to sleep.' They had arrived early since they only had seventeen miles to cover in getting to Capua. The day after, twenty-one miles further along, they had the best accommodations of the trip at a sumptuous villa owned by one of the notables in the party. They lingered long over dinner, being amused no end by a

time-honoured and timeless form of entertainment, a pair of professional comics flinging insults at each other ('I'd say you look like a horse. With horns.' 'You talking—with that scar? What happened, somebody cut off the ones on your forehead?'). Maybe they slept late as well, because all they made the following day was eleven miles to Beneventum. Here the innkeeper was so anxious to do the right thing by his distinguished guests that he almost burned down his kitchen while barbecuing some scrawny fowl for their dinner. By now they were going through the Apennines, and the next night's stand was at a little hostel well in the mountains. Horace had a bad time here. The firewood was damp and the chimney smoked, which made his sore eyes water. And he 'stupidly stayed up till midnight waiting for a liar of a girl'; she never came, he had an erotic dream, and soiled his bedclothes. The next day they did twenty-four miles in wagons (*redae*) to another mountain town where the water was the world's worst but the bread was superb; smart travellers, Horace comments, usually carry off an extra supply since the bread at Canusium, the next stop, is hard as rock. From Canusium they arrived at Rubi dead tired; it had been a long twenty-four miles, and constant rain hardly helped. The day after they made twenty-three miles from Rubi to Bari; the weather was better but the road poorer. By now they were on the coastal plain and the end was almost in sight; they stepped up the pace, reeling off thirty-seven miles to Egnatia on their next to last day (where they got a good laugh when shown the local miracle, an altar that burned incense without fire) and all of thirty-nine to Brindisi on the last—'the end of a long journey as well as scroll' quips Horace in the closing line of his poem. It had taken him about two weeks to do some 375 miles, and he had had his taste of the typical ups and downs of travel: some sunny weather, swift travel on major highways, first-rate accommodations, good company, lots of fun; some rain, slow going over bad roads, primitive hotels, traveller's tummy, nights without sleep, and a rendezvous with a girl who never showed up.

## I2

### Inns and Restaurants

Where to stay? It was a crucial question as a traveller walked off a dock, or neared the gate of a town, or noted night darkening the sky while on the open road.

If he was in the service of the government, he would go to the nearest facility maintained by the *cursus publicus*. If he was well-to-do or noble or both, there were a number of equally simple alternatives. He might have a house or estate at the intended destination (195 above), and all he need do was alert the servants to his arrival. Here, for example, is the text of a letter sent in A.D. 256 by a wealthy landowner to one of his caretakers:

God willing, expect us to come to you on the 23rd. As soon as you receive this letter of mine, do your best to have the bathroom heated, having logs brought in and collecting chaff from everywhere, so that we can bathe in warmth since it is now winter. . . . See to it that we have everything we need, especially a nice pig for my guests—but let it be a good one, not like the last time, skinny and worthless. And send word to the fishermen to bring us some fish.

The writer lived in Egypt, and the estate he intended to visit was in the Fayum; letters like this must have been received day in and day out by bailiffs and caretakers all over the Roman Empire. Owners of villas that lay more than a day's travel from town often maintained lodgings at strategic points to provide shelter during the journey there and back (138 above).