

Egypt, and from the Septuagint, the translation into Greek of the Hebrew Bible, exposure to the ancient Mosaic texts.

#### UNRAVELING OF ALEXANDER'S VISION

This great cosmopolitan experiment began to unravel barely a century after Alexander's death. Increasingly, Greek rulers and settlers, who accounted for no more than 10 percent of the total population in the new Hellenistic kingdoms, refused to share power and prestige with the races among whom they had settled.

By the second century, many Egyptians and Persians chafed against their growing marginalization, sometimes taking the form of insurrection against Greek rule.<sup>32</sup> In Judea, local religious partisans revolted against attempts by the Seleucid Greeks to impose pagan worship on the small but stubbornly independent-minded populace. In 168 B.C., the Jews successfully broke away from Greek rule, reestablishing their own independent state.<sup>33</sup>

Even in Alexandria, conflicts among Greeks, Jews, and native Egyptians worsened. Corruption and palace intrigue increasingly undercut economic progress and weakened the authority of the rulers. Less than two centuries after Alexander's conquest, his Mesopotamian possessions fell to the Parthians. The Greek Indian colonies dropped even more quickly outside the orbit of the Hellenistic world.<sup>34</sup>

#### CHAPTER FIVE

## ROME—THE FIRST MEGACITY

Titus Petronius, the son of wealthy Romans and courtier to Emperor Nero, spent his time carousing through the back alleys of the city's streets, dallying with the prostitutes and loose aristocratic ladies with equal enthusiasm. Later forced to commit suicide because of his alleged complicity in a palace intrigue, Petronius left behind remarkable descriptions and insights into this city and the empire that it had created.<sup>1</sup>

By his time, Rome had grown to a scale not to be seen again till modern times—a massive, sprawling capital city, a warren of marketplaces, drinking places, temples, crowded tenements, and aristocratic villas. In Petronius's Rome, we transcend the bounds of antiquity and move closer to contemporary New York City, Tokyo, London, Los Angeles, Shanghai, or Mexico City. With a population of more than 1 million, Rome was two to three times larger than early giant cities such as Babylon.<sup>2</sup> Like later urban leviathans, noted Lewis Mumford, Rome suffered from what he called "megalopolitan elephantiasis," a total loss of human scale.<sup>3</sup>

Yet to their everlasting credit, the Romans created the legal, economic, and engineering structures that allowed this leviathan to function as the nerve center of the world for roughly half a millennium. At its height, this greatest of city-empires ruled an expanse stretching from Britain to Mesopotamia and contained as many as 50 million people.<sup>4</sup>

