By ca. 150 BC, the Romans dominated most of the lands along the Mediterranean, including much of the Hellenistic world. Roman rule only became more extensive over the next two centuries (Map 3.1). The inhabitants of what had started as a city state in central Italy could refer to the Mediterranean as *mare nostrum*, “our sea.” Sometimes, however, by “Roman Empire” historians mean “Rome when it was ruled by an emperor.” In other words, they are talking about Rome after the fall of its Republic (i.e., government without a king) and its replacement by a monarchy, usually said to have happened with the rise to power of Augustus (31 BC–AD 14), conventionally considered the first Roman emperor.

This chapter attempts to account for Rome’s transformation into an empire in both senses. And, it will be argued, Rome’s emergence as a multinational, Mediterranean empire played a large role in the transformation of the Roman Republic into a monarchy. Classical culture would cement that empire. Before considering these developments, however, it will be best to examine Rome in its early days, before empire in either sense was a concern.