

Crime and Punishment

Learning Objective:

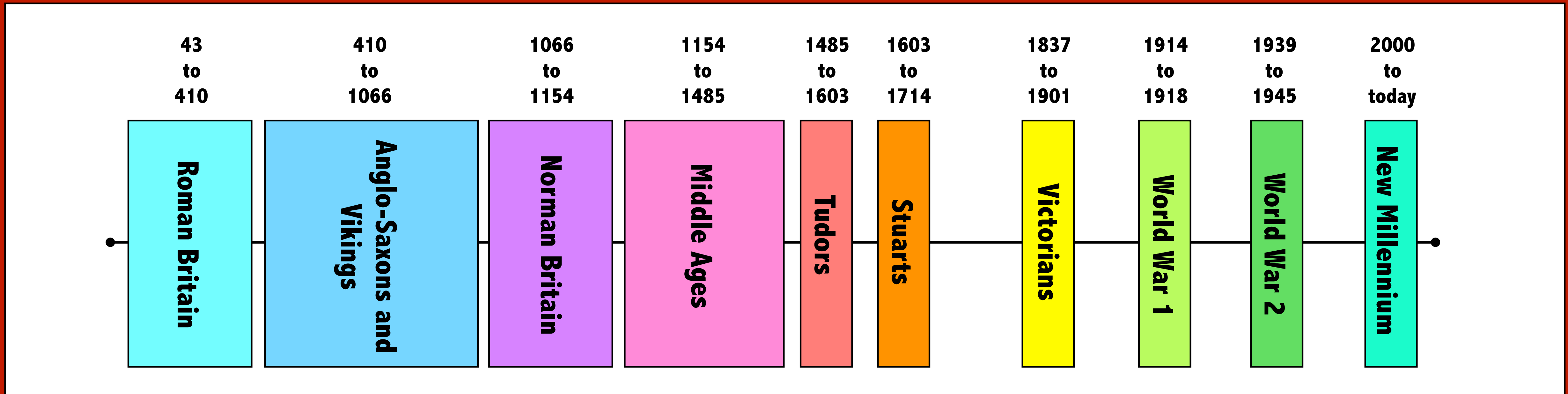
To explore crime and punishment in the Roman period.



Can you remember when
the Roman period was?



Rome was a republic from around 509 BC until 44 BC when Julius Caesar was made Emperor. After this, Rome became an Empire. It was rich and powerful.



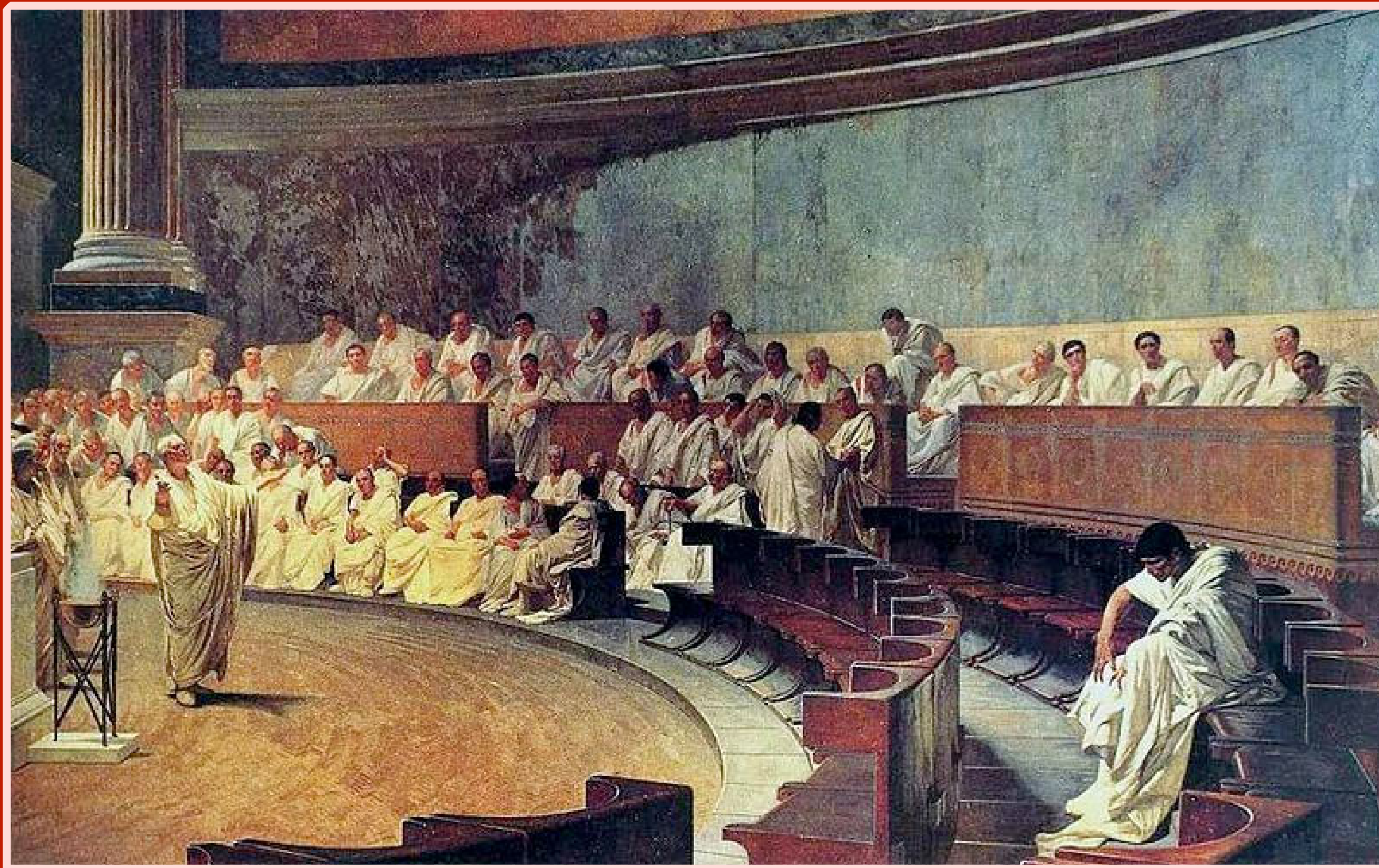
The Romans invaded Britain three times before finally succeeding in AD 43. The Romans remained in Britain until AD 410.



This map shows all the land the Romans had conquered at the height of their power.



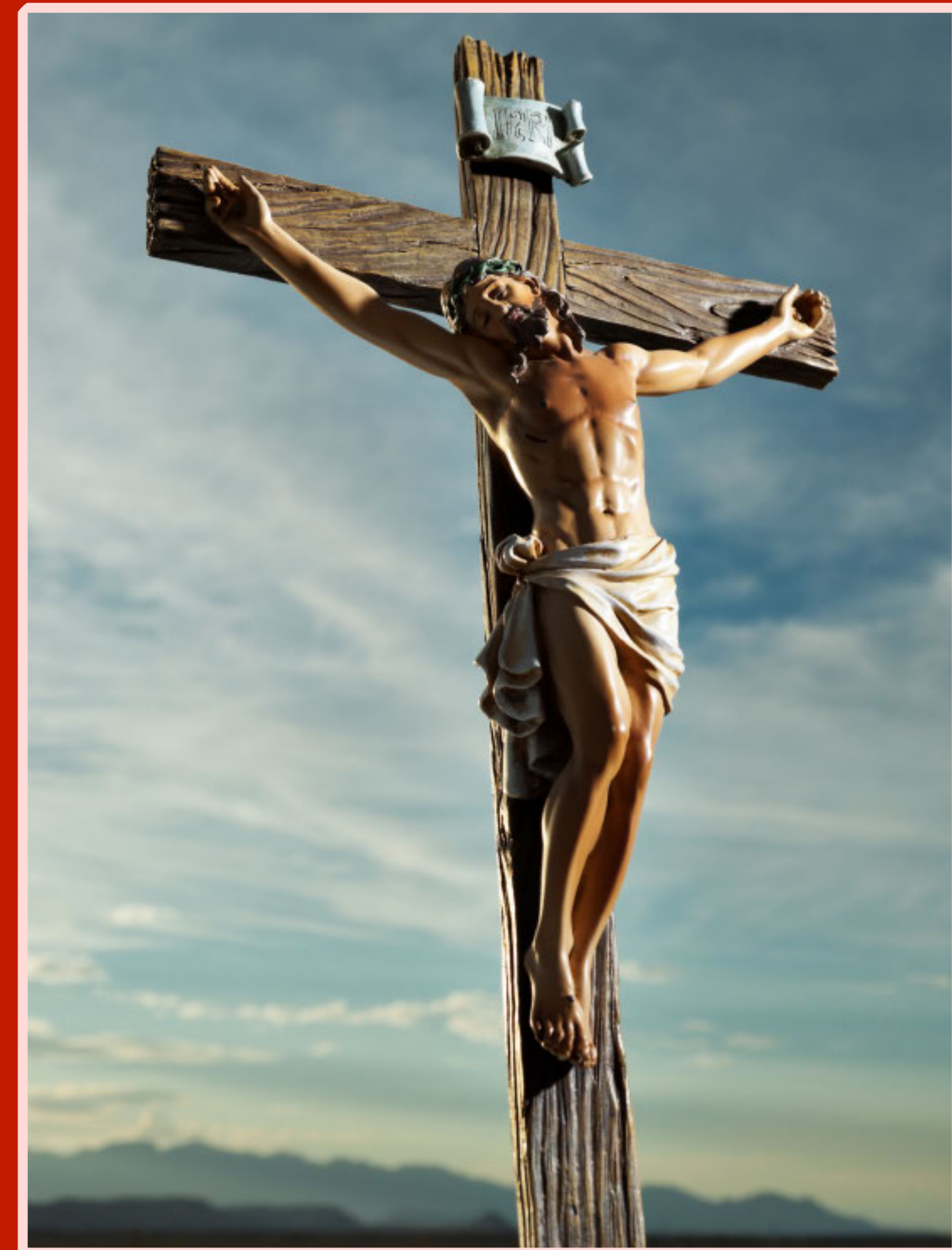
By the time the Romans got to Britain, they had already developed a very detailed legal process. Citizens were covered by Roman law while non-citizens (most of the population) were covered by local law.



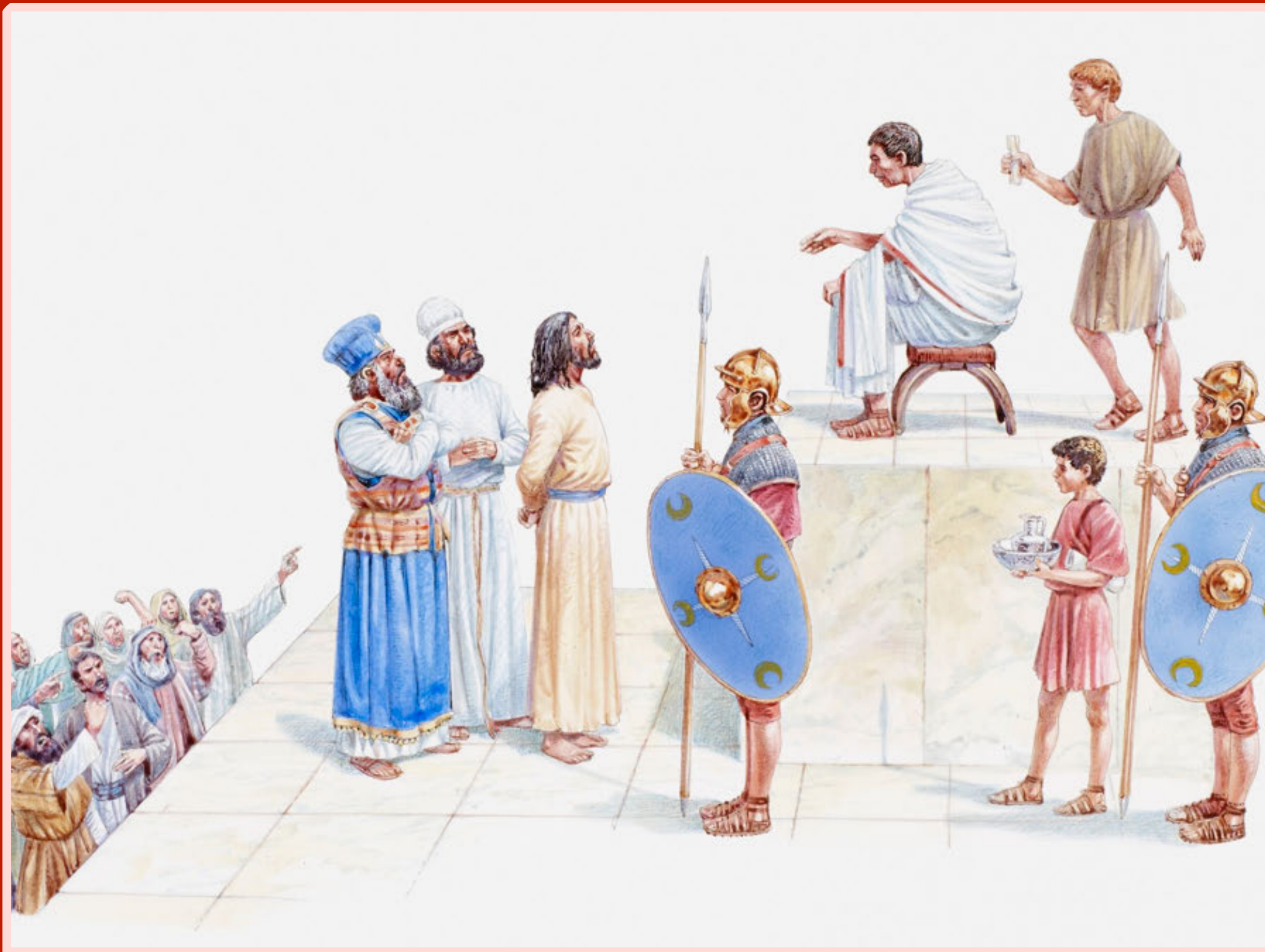
The Romans had laws to cover every possible crime, from assassinating the Emperor to polluting the streets.

The Romans believed that if you punished crimes harshly, people would be deterred from committing crimes in the first place. However, how you were punished depended on how important you were.

The worst punishment in Roman law was crucifixion. This involved being nailed to a cross through your wrists and heels. Crucifixion wasn't just intended to execute someone, but to cause them the maximum pain, humiliation and disgrace.



For crimes like burglary, citizens were expected to catch the criminal and bring him to the magistrate. A judge would then decide the case. For more serious crimes, a jury would decide if someone was guilty or not.



Under Roman law, any citizen could bring a case to court. Just like today, the defendant was innocent until proven guilty and they were allowed to present evidence in their defence.

Prison was not used as a punishment in Roman times.
They were simply used to hold those awaiting trial or
execution.





Can you guess which punishment Romans would have given for each of these crimes?

Stealing from a temple

A fine

Sold into slavery

Death



If you were caught stealing from a temple, you were sentenced to death. Now try this one...



Refusing to worship the Emperor as a god

Being shot at with
arrows

Being thrown down a
well

Execution in the
Colosseum



If you refused to worship the Emperor as a god, you were executed in the Colosseum. What do you think the punishment for this crime was?



Selling bread that was
underweight

Being whipped

Being tickled

Being crucified



If you sold underweight bread, you were whipped. Did you get that right? Try this last one...



Committing patricide (killing your father)

Being branded with hot coals

Being tied in a sack of snakes and being thrown in the river to drown

Being burned at the stake

If you killed your father you
were tied in a sack of snakes
and thrown into the river.
Strange but true!



Because there were no police in Roman times, lots of criminals got away without being punished. People asked their friends to help them catch criminals to take them to trial. However, if this wasn't possible they would ask the gods for help.



This picture shows the remains of a Roman curse tablet. People would write the name of the person who committed the crime on the tablet, then describe what they wanted the gods to do to them to punish them for their crime.

I curse Tretia Maria and her life and mind and memory and liver and lungs mixed up together, and her words, thoughts and memory; thus may she be unable to speak what things are concealed [...]

Read the translation under the picture...



The Roman system of law has had a huge influence on the modern practice of law.

- In the Saxon period, Roman law was the basis of many law systems although a lot was changed.
- From the medieval period, Roman law was rediscovered and used to regulate crimes against property.
- From the 16th century, the rest of Europe used a lot of Roman law, but in England there were other law training centres called Inns of Court.
- Studying Roman law is still important for many trainee lawyers today.

