

TRADE IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

Purpose

Evaluating a primary source will help you understand the connections between two of the most powerful empires in the ancient world.

Process

1. Read the primary source excerpt below, and then answer the questions that follow.

First bring before me the trophies of Luxury, exhibiting them as you please I see tables and pieces of wood valued at the price of a senator's estate I see crystal vessels, whose price is enhanced by their fragility, for among the ignorant the risk of losing things increases their value instead of lowering it ... I see [glass] cups, for luxury would be too cheap if men did not drink to one another out of hollow gems the wine to be afterwards thrown up again. ... I see ladies' silk dresses, if those deserve to be called dresses which can neither cover their body or their shame; when wearing which, they can scarcely with a good conscience, swear that they are not naked. These are imported at a vast expense from nations unknown even to trade, in order that our matrons may show as much of their persons in public as they do to their lovers in private.

Source: Seneca, *L. Annaeus Seneca on Benefits*, ed. Aubrey Stewart (Project Gutenberg, 2013), Book VII, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3794/3794-h/3794-h.htm>.

2. What region do you think this person is writing from?

3. Where do you think the trade goods that Seneca mentions are coming from?

4. Why do you think Seneca was upset by this trade?