INTRODUCTION

Before the time of Augustus there had been no official police force in Rome. The patron-client system (the system in which aristocrats protected their supporters from unfair treatment) had kept Rome running fairly smoothly for hundreds of years. However, from the time of the Gracchi brothers at the start of the second century B.C. and onward through a hundred years of civil strife, the social and political system at Rome declined. The social structure crumbled, and disorders broke out in the city. Crimes became an almost daily occurrence, with arson being one of the major problems.

Responding to this disruption of traditional Roman society, Augustus attempted to re-establish old values, unite the people, and bring peace and prosperity to the Roman world. As part of these efforts, he reorganized many aspects of urban life, and one matter that he attended to was the prevention of fires.

After a fire in 23 B.C., Augustus established a fire brigade of 600 slaves (familia pública) to be available when needed. Several more serious fires occurred, and Augustus established the fire brigade on a permanent basis, creating an official corps of 7,000 vigilés. The vigilés were equivalent to a combination of our policemen and firemen. They had various duties, one of which was to prevent and extinguish fires.

Very few Roman sources mention the vigilés; the Digest of Justinian, however, contains a history of fire prevention in Rome and of the establishment of the vigilés as well as a description of the duties of the praefectus vigilum (a combined police and fire chief in modern terms). Justinian was emperor from A.D. 527 to 565, and he appointed a commission of men to collect the works of those classical jurists who had written about the legal precedents affecting Roman public life. Paulus and Ulpianus were two of the writers whose works were included in the Digest. The passage from the Digest about the vigilés includes extracts from both of these jurists. Hence some repetition will be seen in the following paragraphs.
Comprehension Questions

1. Who was in charge of preventing fires in ancient times? (1-2)
2. What were they called and why? (1-2)
3. Who sometimes helped them? (2-3)
4. What additional help was available in emergencies? (3-6)
II.


Comprehension Questions

5. What made Augustus decide to do something? (7–8)
6. Why did he decide to take matters into his own hands? (8–9)
7. What were the three levels of the administrative structure that he established? (9–12)
Cognoscit praefectus vigilum dē incendiāriīs, effrāctōribus, fūribus, raptōribus, receptātōribus, sed viros maximē aтроcēs et fāmōsōs ad praefectum urbis mittit. Et quod plerumque incendia culpā fiunt incolārum, aut fūtibus castigat eōs qui negligenter ignem habent, aut vituperātiōne sēvērā sine fūtibus.

**Comprehension Questions**

8. What is the difference between the type of criminals over whom the praefectus vigilum has jurisdiction and the type that is sent to the praefectus urbis? (13–15)

9. Who is chiefly to blame for fires? (15–17)

10. What two types of punishment can the praefectus vigilum inflict? (16–17)
Comprehension Questions

11. What two things must the praefectus vigilum do? (18–19)
12. With what three things must he be equipped? (19)
13. What two things is he to order all the residents to do? (19–21)

Comprehension Questions

14. How do the instructions given to the praefectus vigilum in lines 22–23 differ from the description of the duties of the praefectus vigilum in lines 15–17?
15. Who should be sent to the praefectus urbis? (23–24)
Discussion Questions

1. Who helped prevent and put out fires before Augustus organized the vigiles? (1–6)
2. Does it appear that these arrangements were effective? What drawbacks might they have had? (1–6)
3. What attitude did Augustus have toward the situation? What does this reveal about his character and position? (7–12)
4. What social class do you suppose the men in the cohorts belonged to? Of what social class do you suppose the tribūnī and the praefectus vigilum were? (9–12)
5. What advantage can you see in the organizational structure that Augustus created? What does it tell us about the structure of Roman society? Who would be responsible to whom? How would the chain of command work? What powers would the tribūnī have? What power would the praefectus have? (9–12)
6. What are the responsibilities and legal authority of the praefectus vigilum? How might his powers be subject to abuse? (13–17)
7. With what is the praefectus vigilum equipped to deal immediately with emergencies? How effective could he be? (18–19)
8. What preventive measures does the praefectus vigilum take? How effective would they be? Why does he order water to be ready only in upper rooms? (19–21)
9. Do the punishments that the praefectus vigilum inflicts seem appropriate to the crimes? How do his powers differ from those of a modern policeman? (13–17 and 22–24)
10. To what extent do you think Augustus' measures were effective in achieving a better-organized and safer city?