



Republicanism in the ancient world

Republicanism and Oligarchy

- Oligarchy = rule of the few (literally) – connected to the Greeks
 - From extreme to moderate
 - Based on wealth, rather than descent
- Republicanism = comes from *res publica* = the public thing
 - Connected to the Roman constitution
 - Concrete divisions

Patricians and Plebeians

Two political castes:

- PATRICIANS
- PLEBEIANS
- Based on family descent

Patricians and Plebeians made the Populus

Patricians vs. Plebeians and power

Patricians

- Julius Caesar
- Sulla
- Aemilius Paulus

Plebeians

- Cato
- Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus

A plethora of assemblies

Like in the Athenian democracy, theoretically the assemblies in the Roman Republic help sovereign power.

Unlike Athens, the Romans had 4 assemblies:

Comitia Curiata = 30 lictors. Power over imperium confirmations, wills, adoptions

Comitia Centuriata = all citizens. Power over declarations of war, capital charges

Comitia tributa populi = all citizens. Power over legislation

Comitia tributa plebis = all plebeians. Power over tribunal laws

Assembly with a slant

Unlike in Athens, in Rome assembly voting was not done individually by the citizens.

Instead, the votes that count in Roman assemblies are in blocks.

The voting blocks were set up in such a way that certain parts of the Roman people had more political power than others.

Divisions in the Comitia

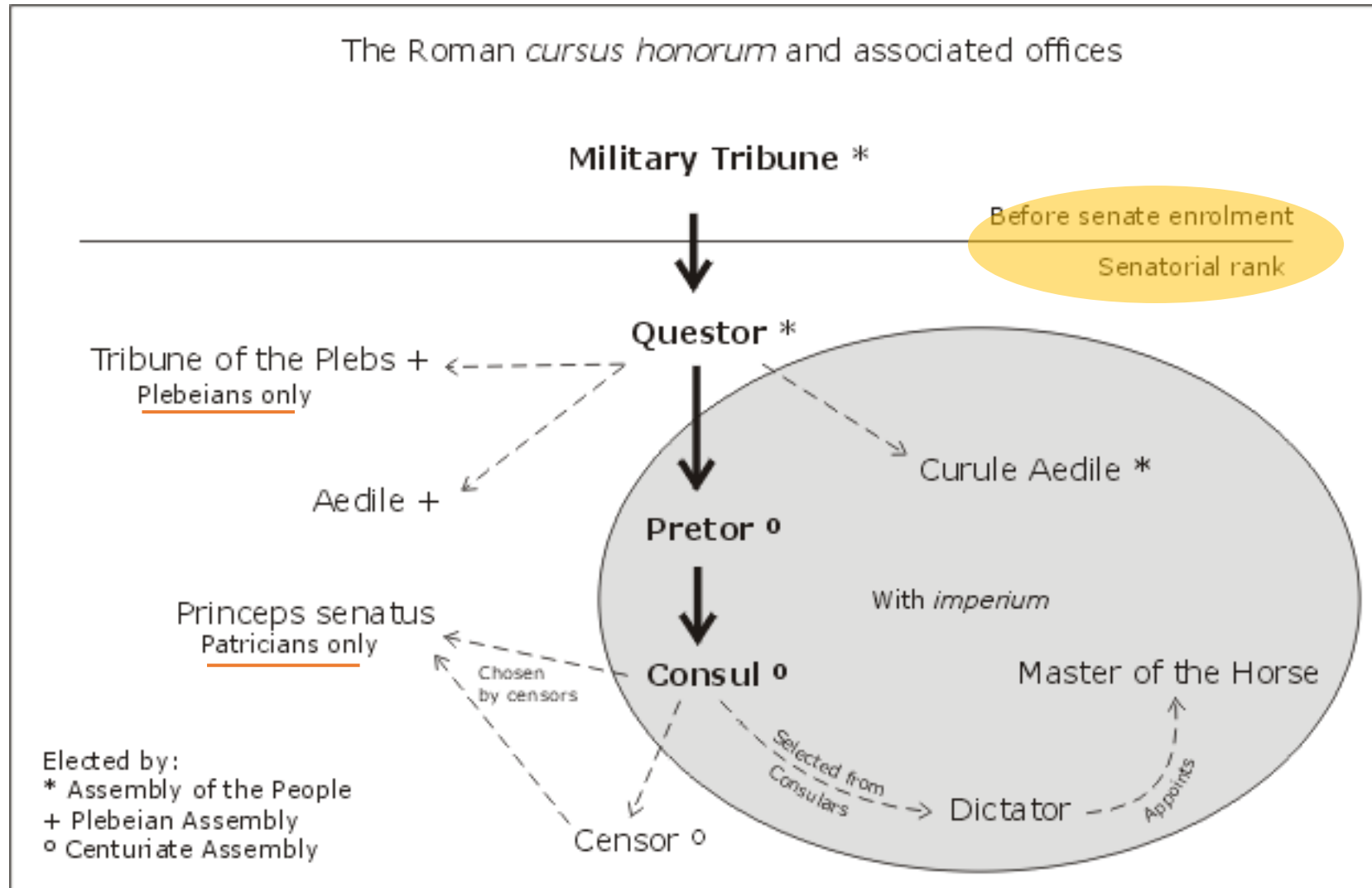
Comitia Centuriata – one vote per century

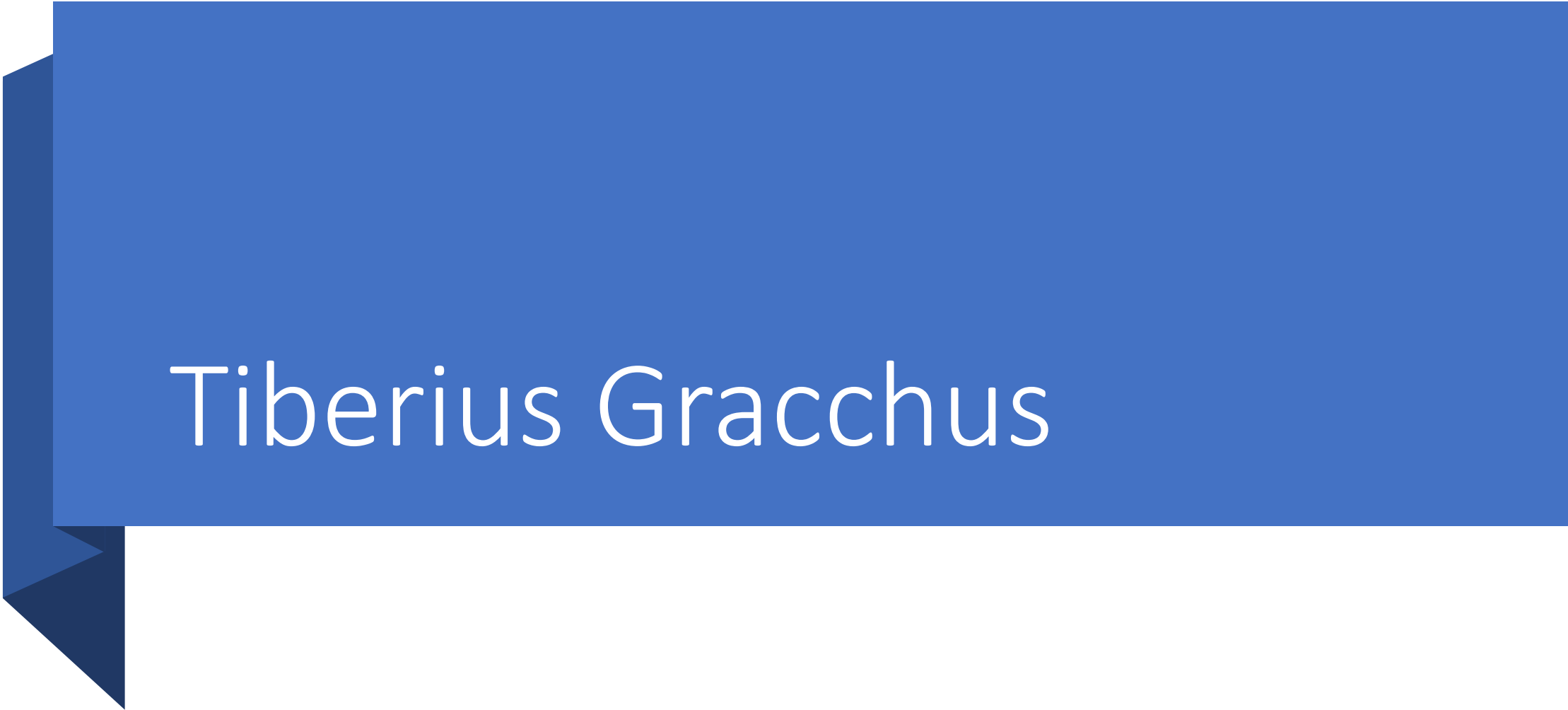
- Apportioning to century according to wealth
- More centuries for wealthy citizens
- All citizens without any land all into one century
- Vote counting of centuries according to wealth
- When majority reached, no more counting

Comitia Tributa – one vote per tribe

- 35 tribes
- 4 tribes for urban (Rome)
- 31 tribes for rural
- All new citizens in 35th tribe
- Voting only happened in ROME itself.

The Cursus Honorum and Magistracies





Tiberius Gracchus

Sources and Views: Cicero

- Tiberius Gracchus sought to carry an agrarian law. It appealed to the common people. It looked likely to safeguard the fortunes of the poor. The best people threw their weight against it because they saw it was a source of discord and belief that to remove the rich from the long-held possessions was to rob the state of its defenders. Cic. Pro Sestio 103
- Tiberius was himself overthrown by the tribune whose veto he had disregarded and whom he had removed from office. For what else was his undoing but his abrogation of an obstructive colleague's powers? Cic. De Leg. 3.24
- What broke Tiberius Gracchus was the resolute obduracy which Marcus Octavius displayed in the noblest of causes Cic. Br. 95

Sources and views: Appian

- It most upset the rich making them no longer able to ignore the law, as in the past, on account of the commissioners... On the other hand the poor bewailed their reduction from a decent livelihood to extreme indigence and consequent childlessness. Appian BC 1.10.3
- Tiberius ordered the clerk to read out the bill, but one of the other tribunes, Marcus Octavius, who had been put up to block the bill by the men of property – and at Rome a veto always defeats an affirmative proposal – ordered the clerk to be silent... As the tribunes fell to mutual recrimination and the crowd began to get noisy, the leading citizens appealed to the tribunes to submit their differences to the Senate. Appian BC 1.12

Sources and views: Plutarch

- Abandoning argument, the rich turned to one of the tribunes, Marcus Octavius. He was a friend and contemporary of Tiberius... in the end the insistent pleas of many powerful men drove him to oppose Tiberius, and he set about blocking his bill. Plut. TG 10
- Tiberius' friends urged him to try for a second tribunate for the coming year; he at once set to winning over the masses with further laws reducing the period of military service, allowing appeal to the people from court decisions, adding an equal number of knights to the court-panels, at that time exclusively senatorial in composition, and in general cutting down the power of the Senate... Plut. TG 16