

ATHENS AND ROME: LIFE AND CULTURE IN CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

Lecture 8 – Republic to Empire

CLCS4007

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Roman Constitutional History

- ▣ Period of Kings 753 (foundation) to 509 BC (overthrow of Tarquin the Proud).
- ▣ Republic 509 to 31/30 BC – Octavian's victory at Actium and suicide of Antony and Cleopatra.
- ▣ Imperial period 30 BC to AD 476 (last Roman emperor of the West overthrown by Odoacer).
 - Principate = Augustus to c. early-mid third century AD.
 - Dominate = Diocletian to end of Western Empire.

Important Sources

- ▣ **Polybius** (c.200-118 BC) – interpreting Roman system within the framework of earlier Greek constitutional thought.
- ▣ **Cicero** (106-43 BC) – composes speeches and write many letters to his friends and contemporaries which have been preserved – useful for late Republic.
- ▣ **Livy** (59 BC-AD 17) – relying on earlier historical sources lost to us, potential issues of anachronism.

Republican System

- ▣ SPQR – *Senatus Populusque Romanus*.
- ▣ Senate.
- ▣ Elected Magistracies.
- ▣ Popular Assemblies.



Denarius (AR)

Lugdunum – AD 68/69

Obv – Mars Ultor – Rev – SPQR

RIC 54; BMC 23

Senate

- ▣ Initially 100 Patricians appointed by Romulus.
- ▣ In Republic c.300 men, goes up to 1000 by time Octavian defeats Antony.
- ▣ Censors could expel members.
- ▣ By time of Sulla (82-79 BC) – holding quaestorship a prerequisite for being a member.



Curia Julia

Cursus Honorum

▣ Consuls

- chief magistrates
- two consuls
- pro-consuls govern provinces.
- minimum age 40 or 42.

▣ Praetors

- judicial administration
- 6 to 8 praetorships
- pro-praetors govern provinces.
- minimum age 39.

▣ Aediles

- maintenance of public buildings and oversight of the markets, public games, and amenities.
- no *imperium*
- minimum age 37.

▣ Quaestors

- administrative duties or aids to provincial governors
- no *imperium*
- 40 quaestors by time of Caesar
- minimum age 30.

▣ Censors

- regulate membership of the senate and citizenship.

▣ Tribunes

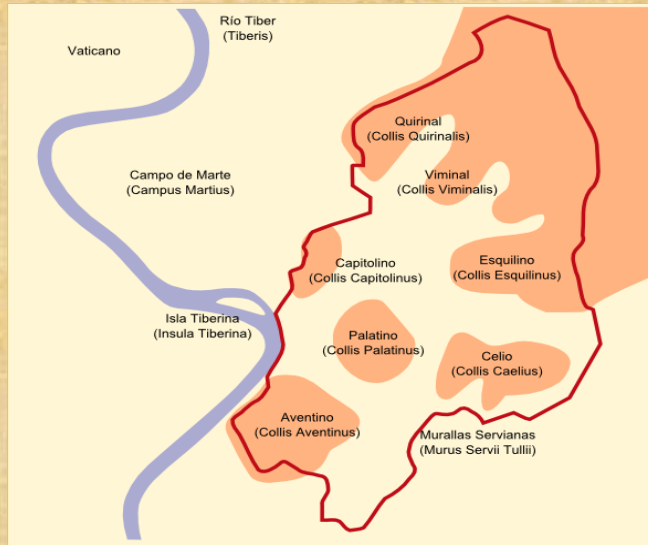
- Tribune of the Plebs
- Military Tribunes
- Tribunes of the treasury.

▣ Dictatorship

- grants unrestricted *imperium*.
- emergency temporary office of six months, however, cf. Sulla, Julius Caesar.

Popular Assemblies

- ▣ Assemblies had purely electoral function, did not debate issues like Athenian Ekklesia.
- ▣ *Comitia centuriata* – Century assembly – voted on war, elected magistrates with *imperium*.
- ▣ *Comitia tributa* – Tribal assembly – 35 tribes (31 rural, 4 city) – elect quaestors, aediles, tribunes – try judicial cases (until Sulla).
- ▣ *Concilium plebis* – Plebeian council – summoned by the peoples tribunes and considers proposals put forward by them.



Sundial (horologium)



Pantheon



Augustus' mausoleum

Gaining the Support of the Electorate

- ▣ Making a name for oneself – law-courts, distinguished military service.
- ▣ Public benefaction – building programmes, holding games, spectacles and public feasts.
- ▣ Electoral bribery (officially illegal, but often widespread).

“Constitutional Flexibility”

- ❑ Marius elected for five successive consulships (104-100 BC) to deal with the Cimbri and Teutones.
- ❑ Sulla becomes dictator between 82-79 BC (Julius Caesar becomes dictator for life in 44 BC).
- ❑ Pompey sole consul for 52 BC.
- ❑ Formation of Second Triumvirate in 43 BC.

Establishment of the Principate

- ▣ Augustus first of the “emperors”.
- ▣ *Imperator* - holding *imperium*.
- ▣ Princeps – leading citizen – Principate.
- ▣ Domination of the emperors but within the framework of earlier republic institutions.

Imperial Rule

- “But it were a difficult thing to administer so great a dominion otherwise than by turning it over to one man, **as to a father**... from the time he assumed the **absolute authority**. – Strabo *Geog.* 6.4.
- “...Octavian in the year during which he held the consulship for the fifth time, and he also assumed the title **Imperator**. I am not speaking here of the title which had been bestowed in accordance with the ancient custom upon various generals on account of their victories... I use it in its other context, which denotes the possession of the **supreme power in the state**...” – Dio Cassius 53.17.

Dio Cassius 53.17.

- “Through this process the power both of the people and of the Senate was wholly transferred into the hands of Augustus, and it was from this time that a monarchy, strictly speaking, was established. It would certainly be most truthful to describe it as a monarchy, even if at a later date two or three men held power at the same time. It is true that the Romans hated the actual name of monarch so vehemently that they did not refer to their emperors either as dictators or kings or anything similar.”

New Constitutional Settlement

- ▣ Octavian notionally lays down power in AD 27
 - granted honorific title Augustus
 - Distribution of provinces, Senatorial (pro-consuls) and Imperial (*legatus Augusti pro praetore*).

- ▣ “Second constitutional settlement” in AD 23
 - Augustus subsequently avoids holding consulship (except in 5 BC and 2 BC).
 - granted pro-consular and tribunician powers for life).

Distribution of Provinces



Decline in the Importance of the Plebian Assemblies

- ▣ AD 15 - Tiberius transfers the election of magistrates from popular assemblies to the Senate.
- ▣ Gaius “Caligula” (AD 37-41) restores election of magistrates to the popular assemblies, but this soon abandoned.
- ▣ Assemblies confirm decisions of the emperor.

Juvenal *Satires* 10.77–81

“They shed their sense of responsibility long ago, when they lost their votes and their bribes; the mob that used to grant power, high office, and the legions, everything, curtails its desires, and reveals its anxiety for two things only, **bread and circuses.**”

How to Become Emperor

- ❑ “Dynastic succession” - e.g. Tiberius.
- ❑ Adoption – “Five Good Emperors” – Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius.
- ❑ Usurpation and Assassination – e.g. Gaius to Claudius, Nero to Galba, Alexander Severus to Maximinus Thrax.
- ❑ Support of military and deputy commanders vital.