

From Village to Empire: an Introduction to the History of Rome

Lecture 3: Introduction to the Roman Republic

The seven kings of Rome

753-715	Romulus founds Rome and rules as the first king
715-673	Numa Pompilius , the second king of Rome
673-642	Tullus Hostilius , the third king
642-616	Ancus Marcius , the fourth king
616-579	L. Tarquinius Priscus , the fifth king
579-534	Servius Tullius , the sixth king
534-510	L. Tarquinius Suberbus , the seventh and last king
509	Expulsion of Tarquinius by L. Junius Brutus , and establishment of Republican constitution

NOTE: These dates are traditional. They are **not** historical.

Traditional chronological divisions

753 BC	Traditional date of the foundation of Rome
753-510	The Regal period
509-264	The Early Republic
263-133	The Mid-Republic
132-32	The Late Republic

Kings and consuls

St. Augustine, *The City of God* 5.12: ... when they [i.e. the Romans] found the domination of kings intolerable, they created from themselves an annual authority in the hands of two men, who were called consuls, from *consulere* ['to take council'], not *reges* ('kings'), a word derived from *regnare* ['to reign'].

Florus 1.9.2: It was resolved that there should be an annual instead of a perpetual office, and that it should be exercised by two instead of by one, lest any abuse of power should arise through its possession by a single person or for a long period of time; and these men they called consuls instead of kings, in order that they might be mindful that they must consult the interests of their fellow-citizens.

Eutropius 1.9: Hereafter the consuls came into being. Instead of one king two consuls were elected for this reason, that if one should be disposed to be unjust, the other, having equal power, would control him. Moreover, it was decided that they should not hold office for longer than a year in order that they might not be rendered too arrogant by possessing power for too long, but should always be civic-minded since they would realise that after a year they would again become private citizens.

Republic = *res publica* = the
public thing/ the people's thing

The main assemblies of the Roman Republic

The *comitia centuriata* **(the centuriate assembly/ the assembly by centuries)**

193 centuries, which were divided among five property classes.

First Class	80 centuries
Second Class	20 centuries
Third Class	20 centuries
Fourth Class	20 centuries
Fifth Class	30 centuries
<i>Equites</i> (cavalry)	18 centuries
Engineers and musicians	4 centuries (2 each)
<i>Proletarii</i>	1 century
Total	193 centuries

For: electing senior magistrates, consuls, praetors and censors; declaring war; trials for capital offences.

Met on the Campus Martius.

The main assemblies of the Roman Republic

The *comitia tributa* (the tribal assembly)

35 tribes, of which 4 were 'urban' (i.e. regions of the city of Rome) and 31 were 'rural'.

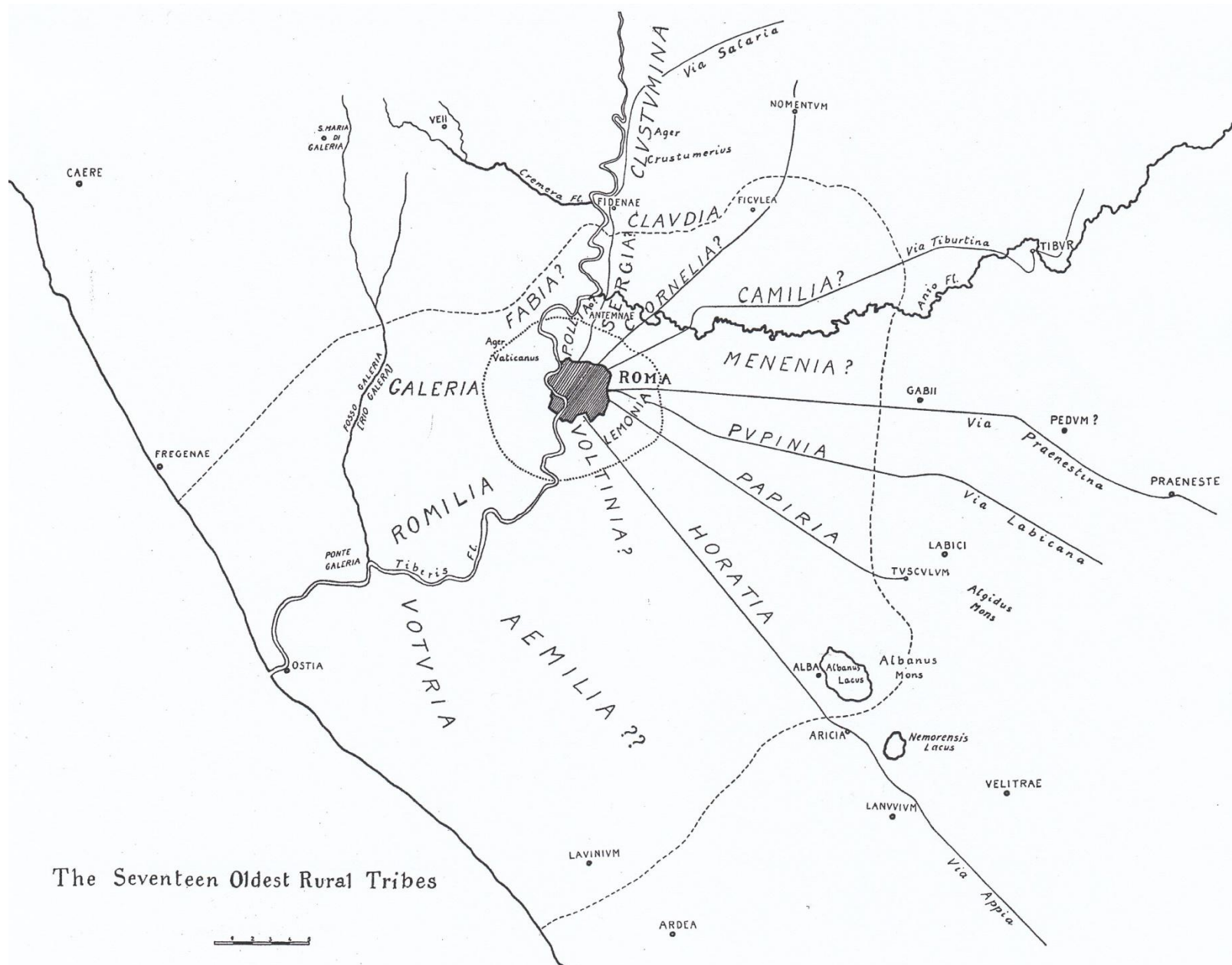
The names of the 35 tribes (*tribus*): **Aemia**, Aniensis, Arnensis, **Camilia**, **Claudia**, Clustumina, Collina, **Cornelia**, Esquilina, **Fabia**, Falerna, **Galeria**, **Horatia**, **Lemonia**, Maecia, **Menenia**, Oufentina, Palatina, **Papiria**, Poblilia, **Pollia**, Pomptina, **Pupinia**, Quirina, **Romilia**, Sabatina, Scaptia, **Sergia**, Stellatina, Suburana, Terentina, Tromentina, Velina, **Voltinia**, **Voturia**.

(names in bold appear to derive from the names of Roman families [*gentes*]; other names are geographical; the names of the 4 urban tribes [i.e. divisions of the city itself] are underlined).

For: election of quaestors, curule aediles and military tribunes; enacting laws; minor trials.

Met in various locations, including the Campus Martius and the Forum.

The Seventeen Oldest Rural Tribes



The Seventeen Oldest Rural Tribes

The main assemblies of the Roman Republic

The *concilium plebis* (the council of the *plebs*)

Voting was conducted by tribes, as with the *comitia tributa*. Indeed, the *comitia tributa* may have been modelled on the *concilium plebis*.

For: election of tribunes of the *plebs* and plebeian aediles; passing of plebiscites (= resolutions of the *concilium plebis*; these later acquired the force of law, but were originally binding on the *plebs* only); minor trials.

Met in various locations, including the Campus Martius and the Forum.

CONSULS

The chief magistrates of the Republic. Two consuls were elected each year by the people. They were said to have inherited most of the powers (and the insignia) of the king, but these powers were curbed by collegiality (for this reason, if a consul died in office, a replacement, known as a 'suffect consul' had to be elected) and by limited tenure of office (the consuls held office for one year only). During the Early and Middle Republic, the consuls were first and foremost military commanders; by the Late Republic, however, they commanded armies only in emergencies.

PRAETORS

Originally only one praetor was elected each year, but the number increased slowly over time. In 81 Sulla raised the total to 8. Julius Caesar later raised it to 16, but Augustus subsequently reduced it to 12. Praetors could lead armies and administer law. The praetorship effectively became a prerequisite for the consulship (thus, in the Late Republic, each year at least 8 praetors would go on to compete for one of only two consulships, so competition was intense).

CENSORS

Two censors were usually elected about every 5 years. They were chosen from amongst the ex-consuls and held office for a maximum of 18 months. They performed a census of the citizen populace and they drew up the roll of senators (the *lectio senatus*). This meant that they could nominate a prominent senator *princeps senatus* ('the leading man of the Senate'). Since they supervised the morals of the community, they could censure those whose conduct was not appropriate and could remove senators from the Senate. They also let contracts for tax-collection, public building projects and performed important expiatory rituals.

DICTATOR

A dictator was a single magistrate who held absolute authority for the performance of a specific duty. A dictator held office for a maximum of 6 months only, but it was traditional for a dictator to resign earlier (as soon as he had completed whatever duty had prompted his appointment). Dictators were often appointed to deal with military emergencies or to oversee elections, if the consuls were not available. By the later Middle Republic (second century BC), the office had fallen into disuse. It was revived by Sulla in modified form, and then by Julius Caesar. Caesar's 'dictator in perpetuity' was contrary to the original ideology of the restricted tenure of the office (remember that power unlimited by time was *regnum*, the power of a king). Note that, when we say that Caesar was a dictator, this does not (necessarily) mean 'dictator' in our sense of the word, but rather that he held this particular magistracy.

MASTER OF THE HORSE

An officer subordinate to a dictator and appointed by him. Dictators directly commanded the infantry and could not, or needed permission to, mount a horse. The master of the horse led the cavalry (but was himself under the command of the dictator).

TRIBUNES OF THE *PLEBS* (*tribuni plebis*)

Said to have been created in 494 BC. The original number of tribunes elected each year is uncertain but by 449 it had supposedly risen to 10. Their power originally came from an oath sworn by the *plebs* to guarantee their inviolability (*sacrosanctitas*), and their fundamental duty appears to have been to protect the *plebs* and their property from the abuses of the patricians and the aristocracy in general. They also possessed the power of veto (*veto* = 'I forbid'), could convene assemblies and propose legislation. Only plebeians could be elected to this office. See next lecture for more information.

AEDILES

Aediles were originally plebeian magistrates (2 in number) subordinate to the tribunes of the *plebs*. 2 patrician aediles were added in 367. The main duties of the aediles included care of the city (the streets, marketplaces, water supply etc), the grain supply and the organisation of public games. The latter could provide an important opportunity for the advancing of an individual's career (if his games were sufficiently lavish).

QUAESTORS

The most junior of magistrates. After Sulla, 20 were elected each year. Julius Caesar doubled the number, but Augustus reduced it to 20. They performed various administrative duties, including the administration of the public treasury. They also aided provincial governors.

PROCONSULS (*pro consule* = 'instead of a consul')

'Magistrates' serving in place of a consul outside Rome, usually in a restricted geographical area. In the Late Republic most provincial governors governed *pro consule*.

LEGATES (sing., *legatus*; plu., *legati*)

Legates served on the staff of military commanders and provincial governors. The term *legatus* could also refer to an envoy.

New terms and further information

For more detailed information, a convenient place to start is the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, third edition, edited by S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth (Oxford, 1996). This is a very useful book as it contains entries on all the important topics, people, places etc. in antiquity. Each entry is accompanied by a brief bibliography, so it's an excellent place to start if you're looking to research a specific topic in greater depth, although note that the entries themselves are usually too brief and devoid of argument to make the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* useful in its own right for researching essay questions etc. It also contains explanations of all the standard abbreviations.

Some bibliography

M. Beard and M. Crawford, *Rome in the Late Republic* (London, 1985), chapter 4.

T. J. Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome* (London, 1995).

M. Crawford, *The Roman Republic*, second edition (London, 1992), appendix 1 (= pp. 194-97).

A. Lintott, *The Constitution of the Roman Republic* (Oxford, 1999).