

Roman Political system



Monarchy To Republic

- The earliest inhabitants of Italian Peninsula were Latins, greeks and Etruscans.
- Etruscans conquered the battle of control over Italy.
- The last Etruscan king was Tarquin the Proud – very harsh tyrant.
- Romans overthrew Etruscan rule and decided to establish Republic – a representative government.

Political Structure

- The Roman Republic was organised much like our modern political system. Since the Romans did not want one man to make all of the laws, they decided to balance the power of the government between three branches:
- The Executive branch – Consuls and Magistrates
- The Legislative branch – Senate and legislative assemblies
- The Judicial branch – Councils and courts

Executive Branch

- The two leaders of the executive branch, the *consuls*, were elected for just one year by the patrician class.
- They supervised the Senate and ordered the Roman army during wars.
- Each year, two consuls were elected together, to serve for a one-year term. Each consul was given *veto* power over his colleague and the officials would alternate each month.
- Consuls had extensive capacities in peacetime (administrative, legislative and judicial), and in wartime often held the highest military command.
- Other members of the executive branch were the tax collectors, mayors, city police, and other people in positions of power in cities.

Legislative Branch

- **Assembly of the Curia** – (comitia curiata) was the principal assembly during the first two decades of the Roman Republic.
- **Assembly of the Centuries** – (comitia centuriata or "Army Assembly") of the Roman Republic was the democratic assembly of the Roman soldiers. Every Roman citizen with the required wealth could vote, regardless of class.
- **Assembly of the Tribes** – (comitia tributa) of the Roman Republic was the democratic assembly of Roman citizens.
- **Plebeian Council** – (concilium plebis) was the principal popular gathering of the Roman Republic. It functioned as a gathering through which the Plebeians (commoners) could pass laws, elect magistrates, and try judicial cases.

- **Senate-** part of Legislative branch but had little legislative authority.
- members were appointed by the consuls, and later by the censors.
- Served as an advisory body to the consuls and later emperors.
- The Senate passed money bills and control what money would be spent on.
- supervised relations with foreign powers.
- The Senate was further empowered to authorize the nomination of a dictator to deal with state emergencies.

Judicial Branch

- The judicial branch had six judges who were elected every two years.
- They were in charge of deciding punishments that criminals would receive.
- Executive magistrates: Consuls, praetors, censors, aediles, quaestors, tribunes, and dictators.
- Plebeian Council also presided over judicial cases.

Roman Justice Sytem

- The Roman judicial system distinguished laws from facts. There was a systematic approach to adjudication.
- The Romans codified the abstract notions of laws and put them into daily use.
- Roman law left behind a huge body of statutes and case law that first appeared in written form in 450 B.C. as the **Twelve Tables**, bronze tablets on which the first codified laws of the Roman Republic were inscribed. It established rule of law.
- Roman law defined property, contracts and crimes. People who were found guilty of crimes and legal authorities who lost their positions for abusing the laws were imprisoned or placed in chains.

- Rome is considered the home of the first bona-fide professional lawyers (men who argued cases for clients before magistrates as opposed to clients representing themselves).
- *juris prudentes* (men wise in law)-analyzed and came up with laws
- *Advocati*- men summoned to one's side.
- *causidici* (speakers of cases)- arguing the cases themselves for their clients.
- The remedies included compensation, death, self help, imprisonment and chaining.
- Compounding of certain offences was allowed.

From Republic to Empire

- The Roman Empire refers to the state that was centered in the city of Rome and included vast territories under Roman rule, dated from approximately 27 BC, when Augustus (63 BC–AD 14) was named the first emperor of Rome, to AD 476, when Romulus Augustulus (fifth century), the last ruler of the Western Roman Empire, was deposed.

Fall of Republic

- The expansion of Rome created a lot of problems.
- Romans fought *Punic* wars with Carthage which resulted into concentration of wealth in the hands of elite. They started to have their own plantations.
- The poor farmers were not able to compete.
- A lot of people became landless as their lands were lost to debt creditors.

- A land reform bill was introduced by a tribune which was blocked by Senate.
- Conflicts began to grow between the Plebian Assembly and the Senate.
- Military commanders recruited landless farmers for an army and initiated a civil war.
- One such commander was General Gaius Marius.
- Marius fought civil war from plebian side against Patricians represented by General Sulla.
- Sulla conquered and became a dictator.

- Political unrest started to uproar with the Catilina Conspiracy.
- Julius Caesar took the command of Rome after having won wars with Gaul which made him popular.
 - In 49 B. C., he named himself dictator of Rome.
 - Caesar made much needed reforms.
 - He relieved debt.
 - He used his wealth to promote building and entertainment in Rome which pacified his subjects.
 - He confiscated land from his opponents and redistributed among his army's veterans.
 - He extended Roman citizenship to people in the conquered provinces.
 - In 44 BCE Caesar was assassinated (stabbed to death) in the Roman forum.
 - Civil War went on for the next 13 years.

- Caesar's nephew, Octavian (AKA Augustus) built a monarchy disguised as a republic.
- He rebuilt the Roman legacy and set up an empire.
- Augustus initiated the Pax Romana which lasted more than 200 years.
- He restored some aspects of the republican government. Senators, consuls, and tribunes once again held office. But Augustus had power over all of them.
- He also began civil services which collected taxes, oversaw the postal system, and managed the grain supply.
- The Roman economy was also united by a common currency.

- The emperor was known as the *princeps* (first citizen) during the first two centuries of the empire.
- Under new system, called the *principate*, the emperor consolidated the political power of several offices that had existed under the Republic: He took on the executive functions of the consul and the religious authority of the high priest.
- Additionally, the emperor was invested with two other types of absolute authority: *imperium proconsulare*, governorship and command of the provinces, and *imperium proconsulare maius*, the power to trump any magistrate anywhere in the empire.

- The emperor convened an imperial council (Consilium Principis) composed of the consuls, other magistrates, and fifteen senators chosen by lots every six months, as an advisory committee.
- The Senate acted as the governing council. It dealt with foreign embassies, made binding decrees, served as the state's highest court, and elected urban magistrates.
- The vast territories of the Roman Empire were managed by provincial governors under supervision of Senate.