

The Division Power in the Roman State

The most important officers of the Roman Republic were the **consuls** and **praetors**. Two **consuls**, chosen annually, administered the government and lead the Roman army into battle. They possessed *imperium*, or the right to command. In 366 BCE, the office of praetor was created. The **praetor** also possessed *imperium*, and could govern Rome when the consuls were away from the city and could also lead armies. The big job of the praetor was to carry out justice. He was in charge of the law as it applied to Roman citizens. As Rome grew, they had a number of administrative officials who handled specialized duties, such as supervising tax revenues and supervising public games.

The Roman senate held an important position in the Roman Republic. The **senate**, or council of elders, was a select group of about three hundred men who served for life. Originally the senate could only give advice to government officials, but this advice was not taken lightly and by the third century BCE it had virtually the force of law.

The Roman Republic had a number of **assemblies**. An assembly was a group of people that make laws or decisions. By far the most important was the *centuriate assembly*. Organized by classes based on wealth, it was set up so that the wealthiest citizens always had a majority. The centuriate assembly passed laws and elected the chief **magistrates**, or government officers. Another assembly, the *council of the plebs*, was created in 471 BCE.

The Struggle of the Orders: Social Division of the Roman Republic

The most noticeable element in the social organization of early Rome was the division between two groups—the **patricians** and the **plebeians**. The patrician class in Rome consisted of families descended from the original senators appointed during the period of the kings. They were great landowners who constituted a wealthy governing class. Only they could be consuls, other magistrates and senators. Because others depended on their wealth, land and power, they controlled the centuriate assembly and other parts of Roman life. The plebeians—less wealthy landowners, artisans, merchants and small farmers—outnumbered the patricians by a large margin. Although they were also citizens, they did not have the same rights as the patricians. Both patricians and plebeians could vote, but only patricians could be elected to governmental offices. Both had the right to make contracts and get married, but intermarriage between plebeians and patricians was forbidden. At the beginning of the fifth century BCE, the plebeians began a struggle to get both political and social equality with the patricians.

The struggle between the two classes dragged on for hundreds of years. A popular assembly for plebeians only, called the council of the plebs, was created in 471 BCE, and new officials, known as the tribunes of the plebs, were given power to protect the plebeians. A new law allowed marriages between patricians and plebeians, and in the fourth century BCE plebeians were permitted to become consuls. Finally, in 287 BCE, the council of the plebs received the right to pass laws for all Romans.

Inquiry Question: How Democratic was the Roman Republic?

Rise of the Roman Republic Timeline

509 BC: Tarquin the Proud, the last king of Rome, was overthrown by a group of patricians upset over his abuse of power. The Roman Republic was proclaimed. 494 BCE: Plebeians rebelled against the patricians over their burden of debt and lack of political rights, beginning a time of social conflict.

287 BC: A law passed by the Tribal Assembly made all new laws passed by the Plebeian Council binding for the Senate and all patricians.

272 BC: Romans conquered the Greek colonies in southern Italy.

189 BC: Romans defeated the Greek king Antiochus III and conquered all Greek lands in Asia.

167 BC: Romans defeated the Greek king Perseus and conquered northern Greece. Greek historian Polybius was captured and taken back to Rome. Polybius entered into the service of the Romans after befriending several high-ranking Roman officials and began writing his Histories, describing how Rome became the dominant world power.

149 BC: Romans conquered all of Greece and destroyed the ancient city of Corinth.

146 BC: Rome defeated and destroyed the city-state of Carthage, its major rival in the Mediterranean region.

119 BC: Greek historian Polybius completed his Histories, detailing how Rome came to dominate the world.

30 BC: Octavian defeated Mark Anthony and Cleopatra, conquering the last Greek kingdom in the world in Egypt. Octavian was appointed Augustus, the first emperor of Rome, signaling the end of the Roman Republic.

		What was it?	What was it's purpose	Who could be part of it?
Consuls		Most important officer in the Roman Republic	Administered the government and lead the army into battle	Male Patricians
Praetor				
Senate				
Tribune				
Assemblies	Centuriate Council			
	Council of the Plebs			