

Latin Standard Level Research Dossier:  
An Analysis of the Advanced Political System of the Ancient Romans

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### Introduction

At its peak under Emperors Augustus and Trajan, the Roman Empire encompassed the entire Mediterranean Sea and occupied the majority of Western Europe and parts of the Middle East. During this period of bold expansion and economic, martial and cultural domination, the Roman Empire was comprised of several conquered regions and a wide variety of national groups. It is undeniable that the Roman Government ruled over the Mediterranean region was uncontested for a significant period of time<sup>1</sup>. It is the particular aim of this analysis to examine the methods of managing such an expansive empire, with a focus on the advanced nature of the ancient Roman political system and its effectiveness, and how such methods led to an effective representative government that allowed for rapid expansion.

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1. Bartlett, Bruce. "How Excessive Government Killed Ancient Rome." *The Cato Institute*.

### Annotated Sources

Source A : Sextus Papirius, *Laws of the Kings* I. Romulus

For the king he chose the following prerogatives: first, to have chief authority in rites and sacrifices, ... then, to maintain guardianship of the laws and the national customs, ... to judge in person the greatest crimes, but to leave the lesser crimes to the senators, ... to summon the Senate and to convoke the Assembly, ... to have absolute command in war.

To the council of the Senate... he assigned the following authority: to decide and to vote on whatever matter the king introduced...

To the common people he granted these three things: to elect the magistrates and to ratify the laws and to decide on war whenever the king permitted... the people did not vote all together, but they were convoked by curias.


This passage reveals the general purpose of Government according to Romulus, the founder and first King of the Roman Republic. Even its infancy, the function of government took on a very progressive role. Here, Romulus outlines a brief social contract between the Roman government and its citizens. Romulus intended for the Senate to act as a balancing power for the King, allowing for representation of the citizens in government policies. It is made clear that the role of government should be a service to citizens, whom Romulus granted several rights and representation in government. This established the centralized nature of Rome's government which represented much of Rome's power.

Source B: Livy, *Ad Urbe Condita Book 1*

After the claims of religion had been duly acknowledged, Romulus called his people to a council. As nothing could unite them into one political body but the observance of common laws and customs, he gave them a body of laws, which he thought would only be respected by a rude and uncivilised race of men if he inspired them with awe by assuming the outward symbols of power. He surrounded himself with greater state, and in particular he called into his service twelve lictors. Some think that he fixed upon this number from the number of the birds who foretold his sovereignty

In this passage, Livy explicates the hierarchical nature of Roman governing. Even before the advent of its imperialistic era, the Roman government maintained a complex structure consisting of multiple layers of authority in with which to create a more representative governing system. Such a complex system of centralized government would be essential in managing the Roman Empire in its rapid expansion. The simpler ladder developed under Romulus would soon evolve into a much more complex pyramid, designed to incorporate checks and balances<sup>1</sup> as the next source will explain. These representative elements in the Roman government model were led by the Senate, which controlled all finances, foreign affairs, and state administration<sup>2</sup>.

Is this  
good or bad?  
did it  
make it  
effective?  
how?




1. McManus, Barbara F. "Roman Government." *VROMA*.

1. Ibid.

Source C: Polybius, *Rome at the End of the Punic War Book 6*, circa 200- after 118 BCE

The three kinds of government, monarchy, aristocracy and democracy, were all found united in the commonwealth of Rome. And so even was the balance between them all, and so regular the administration that resulted from their union, that it was no easy thing to determine with assurance, whether the entire state was to be estimated an aristocracy, a democracy, or a monarchy. For if they turned their view upon the power of the consuls, the government appeared to be purely monarchical and regal. If, again, the authority of the senate was considered, it then seemed to wear the form of aristocracy. And, lastly, if regard was to be had to the share which the people possessed in the administration of affairs, it could then scarcely fail to be denominated a popular state.

In Polybius' account of the Roman government describes certain aspects of its evolving representative elements and the manner in which these several developing branches of government acted in a system of checks and balances. This is a clear predecessor to modern governing systems, including that of the United States of America, in which exists several branches that work to balance power evenly. Similarly, Polybius's account details an advanced hierarchy of governing bodies which act in unity, so much so, that the poet is unable to clearly define for certain the type of government. This acculturation of aristocratic, democratic and monarchical models benefited the Roman Empire in creating a fluid government that was able to act and respond in a flexible manner. ✓✓



Source D: Cicero, *De Re Publica Book 2*, 58 BCE

Our Roman constitution, on the contrary, did not spring from the genius of an individual, but of many; and it was established, not in the lifetime of a man, but in the course of ages and centuries. For (added he) there never yet existed a genius so vast and comprehensive as to allow nothing to escape its attention, and all the geniuses in the world united in a single mind, could never, within the limits of a single life, exert a foresight sufficiently extensive to embrace and harmonize all, without the aid of experience and practice.

This passage further emphasizes the points asserted in Sources A and C concerning the evolution of the Roman government as new territories were incorporated into the empire. While the traditional structure of government remained largely unchanged, new bodies were added to the Magistrate branch in order to more efficiently divide the responsibilities of managing new territories gained. By Cicero's time, forty six magistrates were appointed to oversee smaller tasks such as managing state finances, tending the judicial system and managing public affairs like games and grain supply. The bureaucratization of empire management was essential in order to maintain stability in the centralized government. The corroborative nature of the Roman constitution allowed for such effects to take place.

*constitution??*



Source E: Caius Julius Caesar, *De Bello Gallico* Book 1, 58 BCE

All Gaul is divided into three parts, one of which the Belgae inhabit, the Aquitani another, those who in their own language are called Celts, in our Gauls, the third. All these differ from each other in language, customs and laws. The river Garonne separates the Gauls from the Aquitani; the Marne and the Seine separate them from the Belgae. Of all these, the Belgae are the bravest, because they are furthest from the civilization and refinement of [our] Province, and merchants least frequently resort to them, and import those things which tend to effeminate the mind;

As suggested in Caesar's account of the Gallic Wars, Roman occupation often benefitted the region, as superior Roman engineering allowed for better roads to be built and subsequent increases in trade. With control of the Mediterranean Sea, the Roman Empire exponentially increased its trade opportunities and an increase in the general quality of life to rise. At its peak, it was a great distinction to be a Roman citizen<sup>1</sup>. This socio-economic magnetism towards Roman lifestyles helped maintain peace within conquered regions, which would last up until around 400 BCE.

a little unclear  
how this  
relates.

nothing  
to do  
w/ these

1. Jones, A. H. M. *The Later Roman Empire, 284-602; a Social Economic and Administrative Survey*. Norman: University of Oklahoma

### Conclusion

In summation, the highly innovative model of representative governing within the Roman Empire helped to maintain order up until the later years of the Empire's peak. It is this unity under the government which allowed the Roman emperors to effect a socio-economic magnetism that held the diverse nations that comprised the Empire together. It is my contention that the crippling effects of political corruption and failure to address dissent from occupied regions destroyed the unity of the roman government and trust in its ability to manage an empire. The principle representative elements of the earlier Roman Empire are what allowed for rapid expansion while maintaining cohesion.

Paper ok.  
Needs more persuasion or  
use of evidence better.  
Conclusion introduces new  
thoughts not found in paper.  
5 primary sources



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