

Cursus Honorum

The central political power in Rome was the senate. It was hierarchically organised. The decisions made by the senate were effectively decided only by those senators who had previously held the highest offices as well as the biggest number of offices. So it was the ambition of a young Roman to get as far on the Cursus Honorum, the prescribed sequential order of public offices, as possible.

01

Cursus Honorum

The seat of power: The senate

The central political power in Rome was the senate.



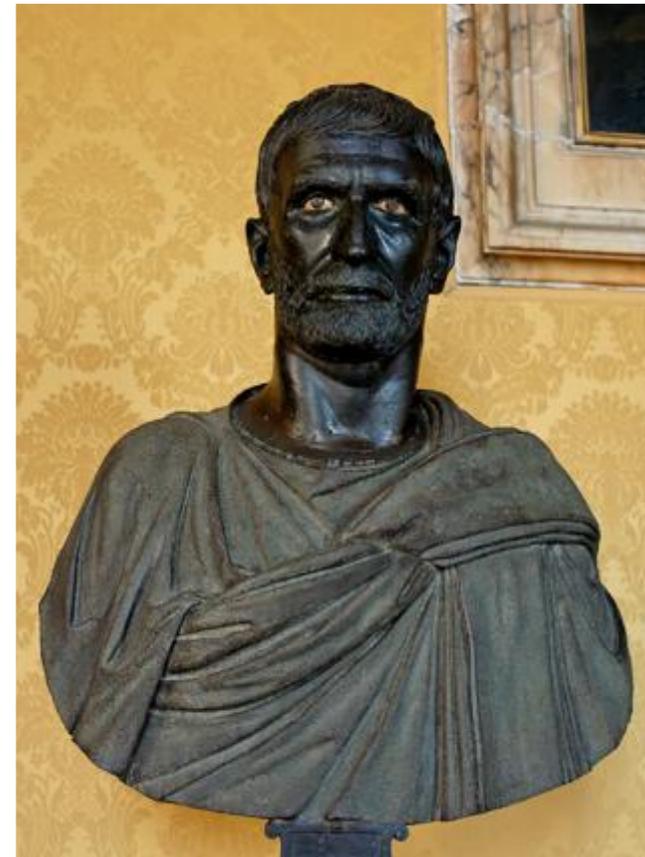
View of the Roman Forum, Rome. Photo: BeBo86 / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en>

02

Cursus Honorum

Rome's legendary first consul

Allegedly, it was Lucius Iunius Brutus who founded the senate. According to legend, he dethroned Rome's last king in 510 BC. In the aftermath, the Roman Republic was proclaimed and the state power transferred to the magistrates. As the story goes, the Romans elected Brutus to be their first consul because they deeply admired him. However, this rendering of history is not supportable in view of more recent scholarship.



So-called Brutus on modern bust. Musei Capitolini, Rome. Photo: Wikicommons / Jastrow.

03

Cursus Honorum

The attributes of power

Still, this coin here depicts him as consul in full official attire, framed by lictors carrying the fasces. The accensus, a kind of crier, leads the procession and clears the way for the consul.



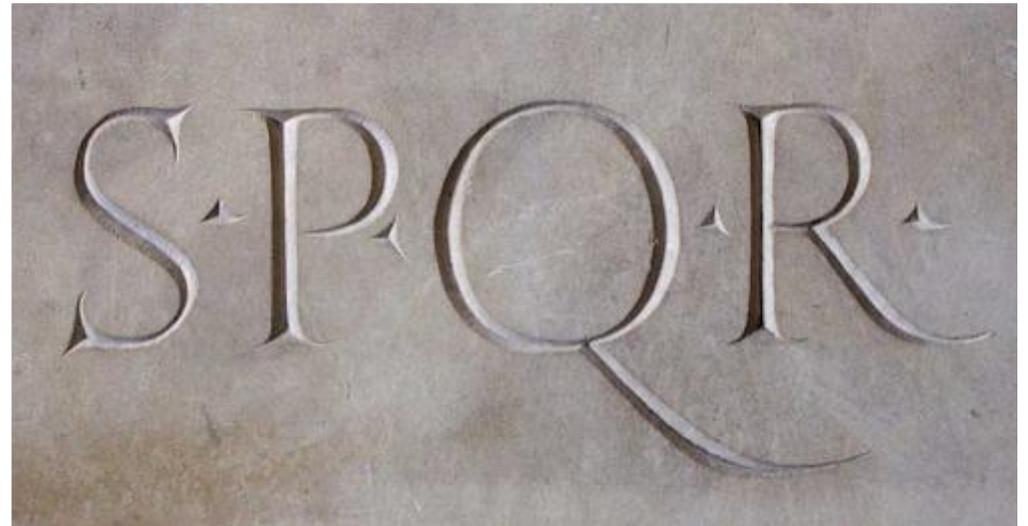
Denarius of M. Iunius Brutus, 54. Obverse: Libertas. Reverse: First consul Lucius Iunius Brutus, surrounded by his lictors.

04

Cursus Honorum

The state is the senate

The senate had such a long-standing tradition that the common people regarded it as the embodiment of state power and, accordingly, treated it with considerable respect. This close relationship finds expression in the established initialism SPQR, *senatus populusque romanus*, which, in translation, means 'The senate and people of Rome'.



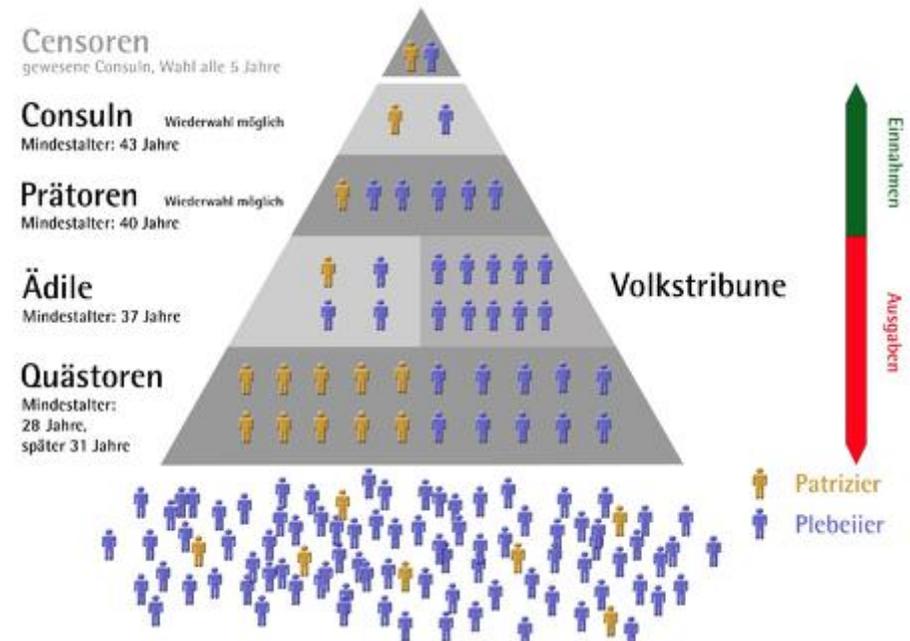
The abbreviation is even today ubiquitous in Rome. Source: Wikicommons / Philippe Remacle/shizhao; <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en>

05

Cursus Honorum

To the top

In theory, the possibility to begin a political career with the office of quaestor was open to every Roman. Once you climbed higher on the ladder of success, the available positions became scarcer. The first obstacle, however, were the financial costs: To win the electorate's favour and increase chances on an election victory, candidates spent enormous sums of money. It took many years before those who had made it to the office of praetor could even begin to hope that their power as policymaker in Rome or governor of a province would eventually enable them to pay off their debts. The system was practically predetermined to force ambitious men into abusing their office and exploiting their subjects.



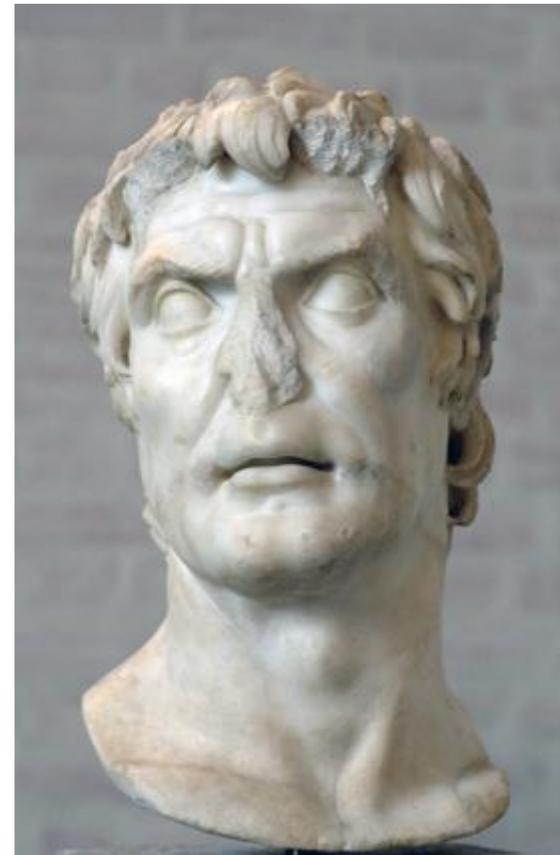
Office pyramid of the Cursus Honorum.

06

Cursus Honorum

Regulating the path of honour

A highly explosive political subject was the question how promotion to higher offices could be earned. In this context, dictator Sulla established the Cursus Honorum in 81 BC. This regulation strictly prescribed the order in which political offices could be held.



Effigy of an anonymous person, usually identified with Sulla. Glyptothek, Munich. Photo: Wikicommons / Bibi Saint-Pol.

07

Cursus Honorum

Financial ruin or success

This turned out to be a serious problem for all those young men who had invested a lot of money to reach the lower ranks, but then failed to be promoted to higher ranks, which was practically the only way to earn the invested money back. Catiline was one of these men. Twice he missed the chance to be elected consul. The political failure meant his financial ruin. Social decline was imminent. Perhaps the only reason behind Catiline conspiracy, made famous by Cicero's speech.



Cicero denouncing Catiline. Historicising fresco by Cesare Maccari, 1888.

08

Cursus Honorum

Games for the people

The first hurdle was being elected aedile or tribune plebis, tribune of the people. Of the 20 quaestors, 10 men from a Plebeian background could rise to the position of tribune, four of Patrician descent to the rank of aedile. As shown on this coin, tribunes sat on the subsellium, the bench on the rostra, when executing their office. The warship rams, which gave the rostra – as the speaker's platform was called in ancient Rome – its name (rostrum = warship ram), are clearly recognisable below.



Denarius of Lollius Palikanus, 45. Obverse: Libertas. Reverse: Subsellium above rostra, seat of the tribune.

09

Cursus Honorum

The insignia of power

Out of 20 quaestors, not more than two made it to the office of consul. In fact, chances were even worse because prominent politicians prided themselves with holding the office more than one term. Sella curulis (curule seat) and fasces (bundle of wooden rods) were the perfect symbols to promote yourself by referring to the fact that one of your ancestors had once held a prestigious political office.



Denarius of L. Furius Brocchus, 63. Obverse: Ceres. Reverse: Curule seat and fasces of a magistrate.

10

Cursus Honorum

Power is visible

Outside the sacred boundary of the city of Rome, lictors also carried axes inside the fasces. They served as reminder that, in the state of war, consuls had the right to have even Roman citizens executed.



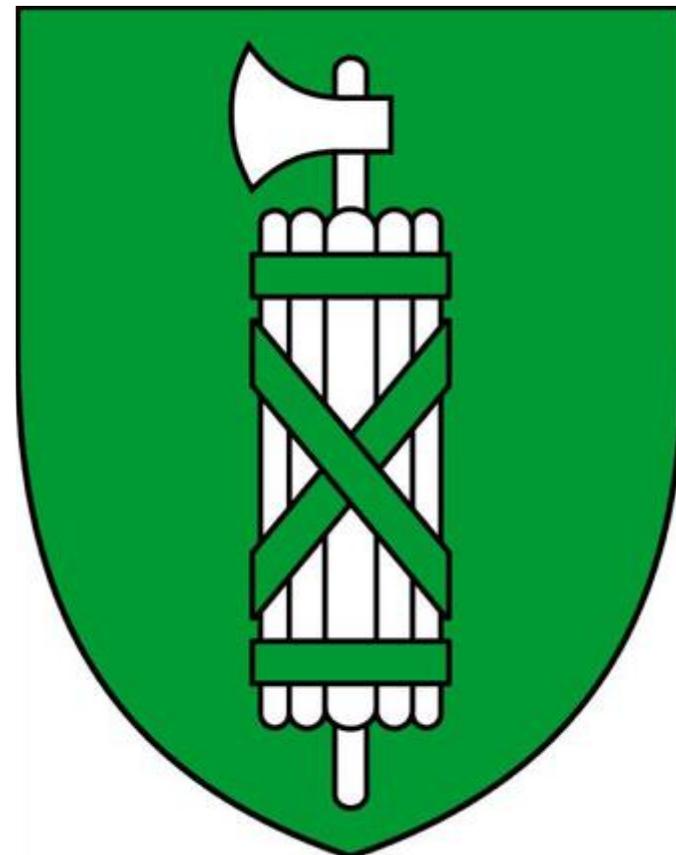
Drawing of a lictor from Cesare Vecellio's (1521–1601) 'Habiti antichi et moderni'. Source: Wikicommons / Shiono Nanami.

11

Cursus Honorum

Strength in unity

The ancient Roman fasces (bundle of wooden rods) have been used since then until the modern times. Not only Napoleon made use of them but also the followers of Benito Mussolini.



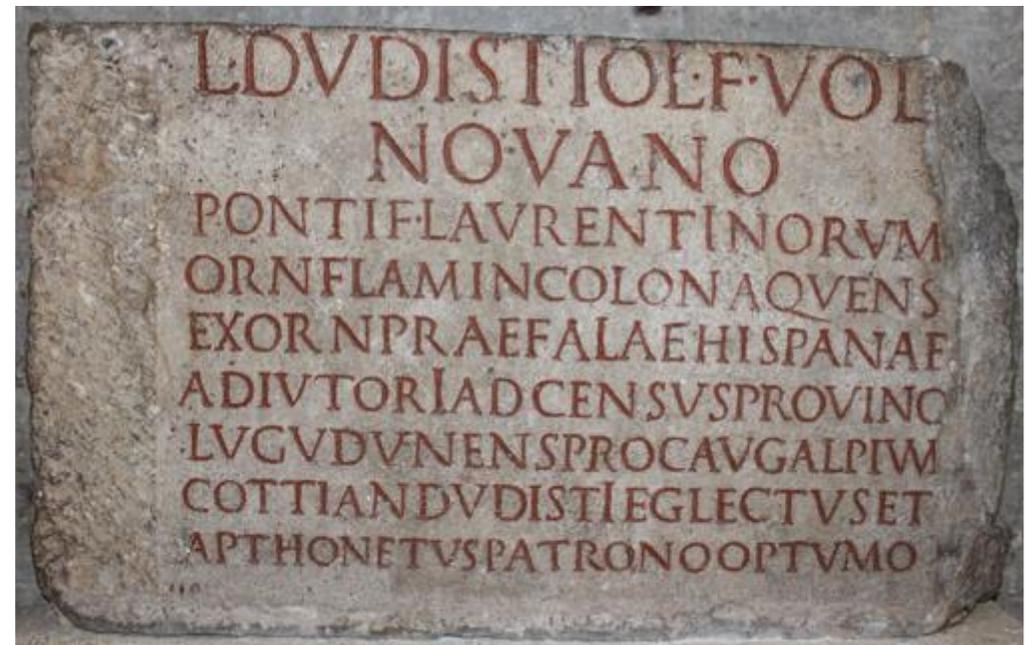
Coat of arms of the Suisse Canton of St Gallen (official coat of arms since 2011). Source: Wikicommons.

12

Cursus Honorum

L. Dudistius Novanus for instance

Although, technically, priesthood was not among the offices of the Cursus Honorum, it was a highly prestigious office and could definitely advance an official's career. This inscription for instance reveals that Roman cavalier Lucius Dudistius Novanus had not only served as procurator of the Cottian Alps, but also as flamen.



Roman inscription from the Roman city of Massilia (modern-day Marseille). Musée Calvet, Avignon. Photo: Wikicommons / Rossignol Benoît / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.de>

13

Cursus Honorum

No mon, no fun

Only the wealthiest Roman citizens could afford a political career as the inferior offices of the Cursus Honorum were not rewarded financially. A young candidate running for one of the offices needed to use his money strategically. One possibility for a candidate was taking on a priestly office and, in this function, entertaining the Roman people royally. Those who had made it far enough to be aediles could ingratiate themselves with the people by generously topping up the budget of the games, which they were responsible for, with private funds.



Pollice Verso by Jean-Léon Gérôme, 1872. Phoenix Art Museum. Photo: Wikicommons / phxart.org.

Elections

State officials were elected in two legislative assemblies. Candidates for the less important offices were elected by the Comitia Populi Tributa, organised on the basis of tribal affiliation, while those for the important offices were elected by the Comitia Centuriata, the century assembly.

01

Elections

Out with the king, in with the Republic

Although the Romans were determined to never tolerate a king in power again, the form of government which they had created with the establishment of the Roman Republic was still far from our modern-day understanding of a democratic system.



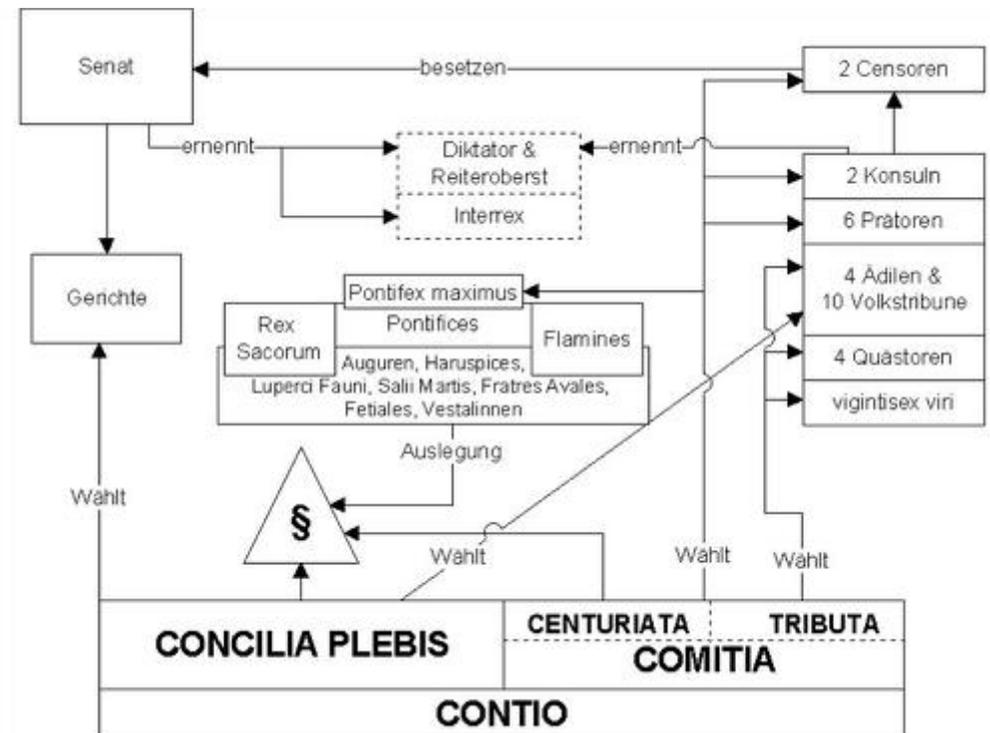
Tarquinius Superbus proclaims himself king. Caricature by John Leech, from 'The Comic History of Rome' by Gilbert Abbott à Beckett, around 1850. Source: Wikicommons.

02

Elections

State structure of the Roman Republic

At first glance, the procedure by which the executive and judicative branches were elected seemed fairly democratic in nature. After all, officials were elected by the people's assemblies, the comitia.



Schematic state structure of the Roman Republic since Sulla. Source: Wikipedia / Maksim / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>

03

Elections

The voice(s) of the people

Legislative power in the Roman Republic was formally divided among three assemblies: Comitia Centuriata, Comitia Tributa and Concilium Plebis. The most influential assembly was the Comitia Centuriata, modelled on the organisational structure of the military. This assembly elected the Republic's highest-ranking magistrates, decided over war and peace and had the power to pass laws. Due to the assembly's military origins, elections were held on the Campus Martius.



Model reconstruction of the Western part of Campus Martius. Source: Wikicommons.

04

Elections

Before the vote

The Comitia Centuriata could neither file petitions, nor propose laws. This right remained a privilege of the magistrates, who informed the population about the topics of the upcoming vote on public notices. Prior to the vote, these issues were debated at a contio. Once the voting had begun, discussions of or amendments to the contents of the law became impossible. Since the lex Papiria had been decreed in 131 BC, the secret ballot was the standard voting system.



Photo: Wikicommons / Ceridwen /
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/fr/deed.en>

05

Elections

Elections – A rare coin theme

What exactly happened at the elections is shown on this coin: Divided into electoral bodies, citizens were called up individually to step onto a bridge. They then received a ballot, which they cast into a voting box at the end of the bridge.



Denarius of P. Licinius Nerva, 113/2. Obverse: Roma. Reverse: Citizen crossing the electoral bridge.

06

Elections

Yet another people's assembly

The Comitia Populi Tributa, the tribal assembly, elected the lower-ranking ('plebeian') magistrates. The assembly was constituted by tribes from 31 rural districts as well as the four urban tribes Subura, Esquilina, Palatina and Collina, whose names were derived from Rome's eponymous hills.



Map of the Seven Hills of Rome. Source: Wikicommons / Burny /

07

Elections

Democracy for everyone (?)

Each Roman citizen belonged to one of those tribes, each of which had exactly one vote in elections. Due to the difference in population density between the very densely settled urban areas and the much less densely populated rural areas, however, rural tribes carried more weight in political decisions. In order to cast their votes, citizens had to travel to Rome personally. As many poorer peasants could not afford the trip to the capital, the de facto influence of the more affluent citizens in the surrounding rural districts was disproportionately great.



Altglienicke, farmer with pig. Photo: Wikicommons / Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-23906-0001 / Quaschinsky, Hans-Günter / CC-BY-SA / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/de/deed.de>

08

Elections

The rich vote first

In the Comitia Centuriata, just like in the Comitia populi tributa, more money equalled more power. In the century assembly, the 18 cavalry centuries, which among them had the wealthiest Roman citizens, enjoyed overwhelming influence. Rome's highest offices were usually assumed by candidates from within their ranks. They were the first allowed to cast their votes.



Roman cavalier, re-enactment at the Roman Army Tactics at Scarborough Castle/ UK. Photo: Wikicommons / Dorieo21/David Friel / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/deed.en>

09

Elections

Are we done yet?

The group next in line was the wealthy first class infantry. A majority could already be reached after this group had cast its vote. And once a majority had been reached, a continuation of the vote was considered unnecessary. Accordingly, the vote of the common people was often inconsequential.



Re-enactment: Attacking Roman soldiers, around AD 70. Re-enactment of the 'Legio XV' in Pram, Austria. Photo: Wikicommons / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en>

10

Elections

Judge Merciless

Every citizen eligible to vote received two tablets, one to express his consent, the other to express rejection. This coin depicts such a tablet with the inscription *vti rogas*. It makes reference to the election of Judge Lucius Cassius Longinus Ravilla. In 113 BC, he made use of the powers invested in him by the people who had elected him: Three vestal virgins had been accused of unchastity, which the Romans interpreted as a sign of bad luck and the reason for their defeat in two decisive battles. As if that hadn't been enough, Ravilla thought it necessary to impose the deadly penalty of immurement upon the three women.



Denarius of L. Cassius Longinus, 63. Obverse: Vesta. Reverse: Citizen with voting tablets in front of a voting box.

11

Elections

But didn't the common people have a say at all?

As long as the wealthy agreed on any legislative matter, be it in the Comitia Centuriata or the Comitia Tributa, the common people simply did not have a say. A commoner may have believed that his vote was of importance when he cast the tablet into the voting box – in fact though, his influence was almost negligible.



Litter bin as voting box, seen in Munich-Schwabing, 2008. Photo: Wikicommons / Mattes / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.de>

Networking

Political decisions – both in the senate and in the legislative assemblies – were based on personal, long-term obligations. I'll help you if you help me – personal favours were a common practice. Such obligations survived over generations.

01

Networking

Representing the people

Although, generally speaking, Roman magistrates were democratically elected officials, they were not representatives of the people as we understand them today.



Suisse Federal Council, 2014. Photo: Wikicommons / Swiss Federal Council / Dominic Büttner/Béatrice Devènes.

02

Networking

Wheeling and dealing

One characteristic feature of Roman-Republican politics was nepotism, also referred to as 'backscratching' or 'wheeling and dealing'. While today's citizens and voters react with indignation, when office-holders manipulate political decisions by secret agreements and backroom deals, such practices were both common and accepted in ancient Rome. Every individual was linked to a number of other individuals in a network of dependencies.



Joseph ('Sepp') Blatter, FIFA President. Photo: Wikicommons / Antonio Cruz/ABr / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.5/br/deed.en>

03

Networking Networks

That did not only hold true for senate and legislative assemblies. Each Roman citizen was in turn enmeshed in a net of responsibilities. So, wives were obliged to obey their husbands, children their parents and slaves their owners.



Playground climbin net, Munich. Photo: Wikicommons / Mummelgrummel / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/deed.de>

04

Networking

Freed, but not quite free

Such relationships of dependence and obedience could not simply be broken off. Even after a slave had been granted freedom, he was still bound to serve his former master (patronus) as a so called client and observe his wishes. This relationship was also transferred to the next generations.



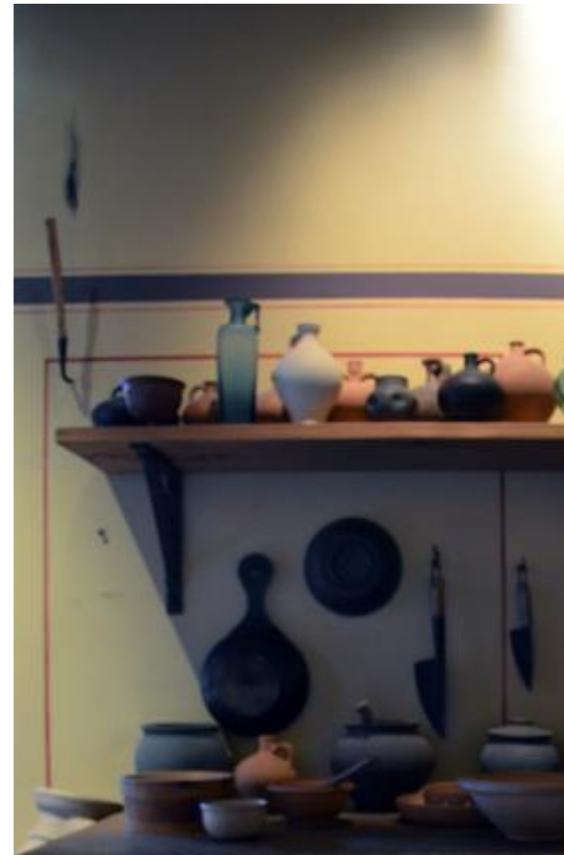
Roman tomb relief of a freed slave and his family. Vatican Museums, Rome. Photo: Wikicommons / Agnete / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/deed.de>

05

Networking

Poor devils

Clients, however, were not necessarily always former slaves. Free Romans in need could also subject themselves to patrons as clients. In exchange, they received food and, if necessary, legal aid.



Kitchen of a reconstructed Roman domus, Römermuseum Augst/Switzerland. Photo: Wikicommons / Carole Raddato/Markus Cyron / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/deed.de>

06 Networking

Obligation is mutual

In return, clients owed their patrons respect and kept them company in public. Moreover, they paid their respects every morning in the atrium of their masters' house (*salutatio*). In reality, most patrons' houses would host many more clients (all male) than Gustave Boulanger imagined in this somewhat romanticised painting.



'The Flute Concert', painting by Gustave Boulanger, 1860. Musée national du château de Versailles. Photo: Wikipedia / Acacia 217/Base Joconde.

07

Networking

The sportula – a gift basket for friends and clients

The best time for the clients to ask for favours and help from their senatorial patrons was when they visited them each morning. It was not unusual for the small people to receive gifts, loans or a dinner invitation on this occasion. At a later date, aristocratic citizens preferred to keep to themselves and merely saved the leftovers from the previous night for their clients, which they packed in a small basket, the sportula. By the 1st century AD, it seems that even this tradition had become too effortful and the sportula been replaced by a fixed sum of about 6 sestertii – an impersonal allowance for the morning visit.



A typical sportula might have looked like this.

08

Networking

The big picture

This seemingly private relationship between patron and client became a matter of political consequence as soon as clients were obliged to vote for their patron's favoured candidate – or the candidate that their patron was in turn obliged to in return.



Urn, used as voting box, 19th century. Stadtmuseum Rottweil. Photo: Wikicommons / FA2010.

09

Networking

Clients by the score

The Romans knew one very simple, but universal principle: If you did someone a favour, he owed you one. If you accepted a favour, you owed him one. This unspoken rule of mutual obligation was so omnipresent in Roman culture and such a vital part of their mentality that military commanders would turn entire peoples into clients after victorious battles.



Augustus paying his respects to Herod the Great. Illustration from 'Antiquities of the Jews' by Flavius Jospheus (anonymyous translation), Jean Bourdichon, around 1470. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris. Source: Wikicommons / <http://mandragore.bnf.fr/> BnF NAF 21013.

10

Networking

From soldiers to loyal clients

Veterans were settled on the newly conquered lands and became their patrons' loyal clients. Thus, a general who had fought in the name of Rome, could gain considerable influence not to be taken lightly by the Roman government.



Joseph Ambrose, 86-year-old World War I veteran, attends the dedication day parade for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in 1982. Photo: Wikicommons / U.S. Census Bureau/Petaholmes.

11

Networking

Patronage carried to extremes

In the end, the omnipresent patronage system led to the collapse of the Roman political system. The system worked as long as there was a balance between the individual groups. However, as soon as one of those groups outbalanced the other due to the conquest of oversized lands, the office-holder suddenly held enough power to throw the system out of balance. Ultimately, that was the reason behind the civil war between Caesar and the senate.



Caesar crossing the Rubicon. Replica of an unknown painting. Source: Wikicommons / Wolpertinger.

A prominent family is half the battle

A crucial prerequisite for a politician's advancement was his descent from a prominent family who had already rendered outstanding services to the state in the past. Of those whose ancestors had done great things, equally great things were expected. Therefore, the best thing you could do to promote yourself was to praise your ancestors' deeds.

01

A prominent family is half the battle

The family is what counts

In the Roman Republic, being or becoming a politician did not take a large fortune. All it took was the right family background.



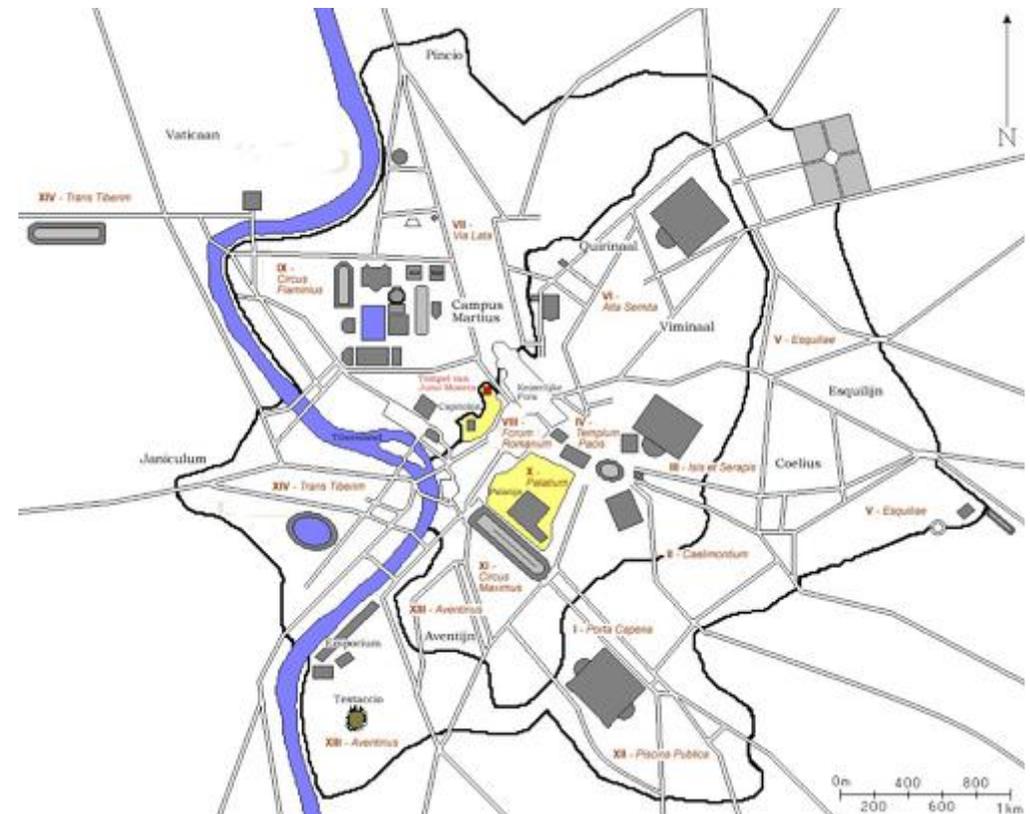
Family picture, 2007, taken in White Sands, New Mexico. Photo: Wikicommons / Eric Ward / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/deed.en>

02

A prominent family is half the battle

Campaigning on coins

So moneyers at the time often used coins as miniature image carriers to promote their own cause in the elections by pointing to their glorious ancestors. These coins were presumably minted in an inconspicuous building near the Temple of Juno Moneta on the Capitoline Hill.



Map of ancient Rome with Temple of Juno Moneta around AD 300.

Source: Wikicommons / ColdEel/Joris1919 /

<http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/GNU->

Lizenz_f%C3%BCr_freie_Dokumentation?uselang=de

03

A prominent family is half the battle

Royal blood

Some moneyers had a very distinguished pedigree indeed, as for instance Lucius Pomponius Molo: On this coin, he claims nothing less than that Numa Pompilius was among his ancestors. According to Roman legend, this Numa had been the second king of Rome and ruled the kingdom in the late 8th and early 7th century BC.



Denarius of L. Pomponius Molo, 97(?). Obverse: Apollo. Reverse: Numa Pompilius attending a sacrificial ritual.

04

A prominent family is half the battle An impeccable pedigree

Numa had been an especially meritorious king if you asked the Romans: They credited him with the reclassification of the Roman population, the establishment of occupational guilds, the reformation of the worship service of Vesta, the construction of the Temple of Janus and more. You can hardly imagine a pedigree better than this one for someone running for a political office.



Nymph Egeria dictating Numa Pompilius the laws of Rome. Painting by Felice Giani (1806), Palazzo dell'Ambasciata di Spagna, Rome. Photo: Wikicommons.

05

A prominent family is half the battle

An ancient legend who survived the centuries

Many centuries later, King Numa is still celebrated as the 'Builder of temples and churches', for instance in the Doge's Palace in Venice.



Photo: Wikicommons / Giovanni Dall'Orto.

06

A prominent family is half the battle

A juvenile hero

The ancestor that Marcus Aemilius Lepidus portrays on this coin is still very young. At the early age of 15, this ancestor had killed an enemy and thereby saved the life of a Roman citizen. For this heroic deed an honorific statue was erected in the centre of Rome, on the Capitoline Hill.



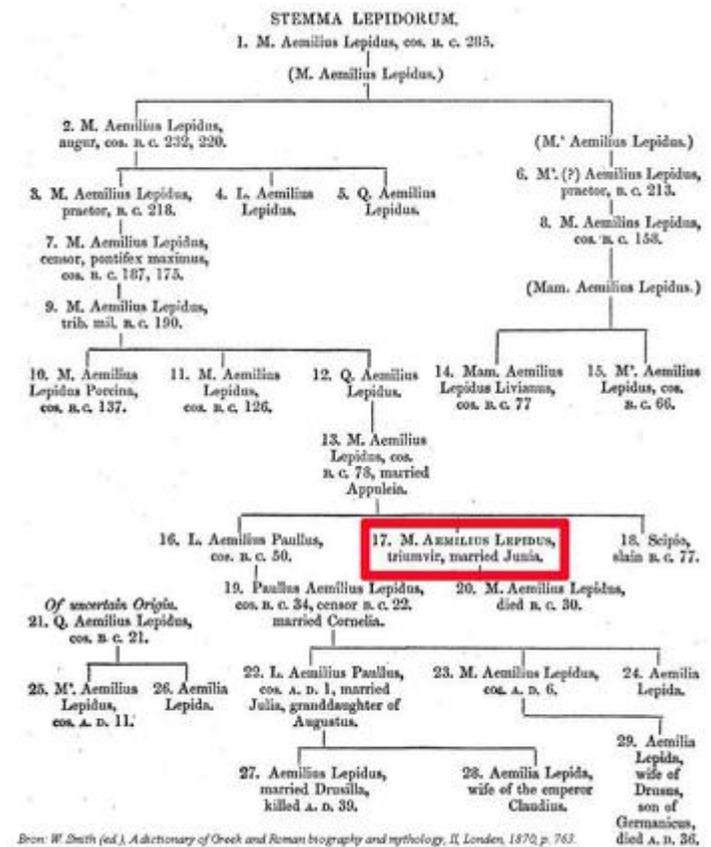
Denarius of M. Aemilius Lepidus, 61. Obverse: Female head with tiara.
Reverse: Equestrian with trophy.

07

A prominent family is half the battle

Heroism runs in the family

The pedigree of the Aemilii Lepidi was not only adorned with a whole series of consuls, but also with Marcus Aemilius Lepidus himself, one of the three rulers of the so-called Second Triumvirate.



Pedigree of the Aemilii Lepidi. Source: Wikicommons / Evil Berry.

09

A prominent family is half the battle

Exemplary mercilessness

On this coin, its creator Quintus Cassius Longinus references Cassius Longinus Ravilla by depicting an urn, tablets and the Temple of Vesta. Judge Ravilla had been particularly merciless when condemning the already acquitted Vestal virgins, who had been convicted for unchastity, to death.



Denarius of Q. Cassius Longinus, 55. Obverse: Libertas. Reverse: Temple of Vesta.

10

A prominent family is half the battle

No isolated case

That this was not the first time Vestal virgins were singled out as scapegoats is exemplified by the legend of Tarpeia. When Rome was under siege by the Sabines, Tarpeia had opened the gates to the Capitoline Hill for the enemy. She had been promised to be given that 'which the Sabines were wearing on their left arm', expecting to be rewarded with golden bracelets. The Sabines, however, had been referring to the shields they were carrying on their left arm and cruelly beat the Vestal virgin to death.



'Tarpeia', drawing in red chalk by Giovanni Bazzi, known as Sodoma (1477–1549), Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. Source: Wikicommons / Diomede / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.de>

11

A prominent family is half the battle

I, too, will make a name for myself

This coin was minted by Caius Coelius Calvus and shows the effigy of his eponymous ancestor on the obverse. Not the best advertisement for Caius, though, as this ancestor had made himself unpopular by introducing the secret ballot to trials for high treason. This is visualised in the image in the tablet with the inscriptions L for libero ('I acquit') and D for damno ('I condemn').



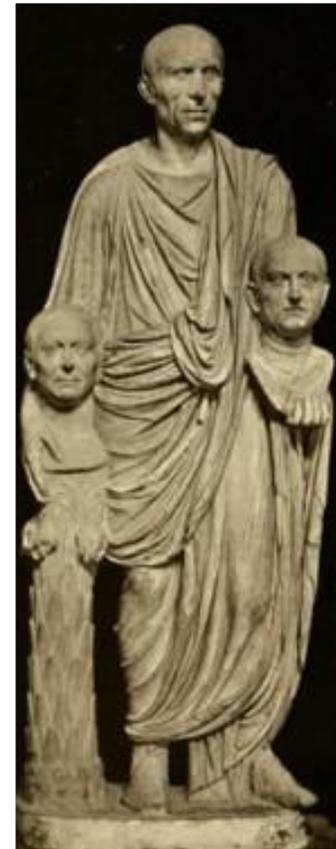
Denarius of C. Coelius Calvus, 51. Obverse: Head of consul C. Coelius Calvus. Reverse: Sol.

12

A prominent family is half the battle

Visualising fame and honour

For the depiction of famous ancestors, die cutters presumably used their death masks (*imagines maiorum*). These were kept in the atrium, a central hall in the Roman house. When an adult member of a prestigious family died, his death mask was exhibited during the funeral procession. Not only were the achievements of the dead read out loud to those present, the death masks, mostly carried by actors during the procession, also visually represented the influential family of the bemoaned.



The so-called Togatus Barberini, Centrale Montemartini, Rome. Photo: Wikicommons / Barberini Collection.

13

A prominent family is half the battle

Overdoing it

When advertising yourself, however, to do well is better than to mean well. Caius Coelius Caldus may have meant well but he certainly did not do well: This coin is cluttered with images and inscriptions which reference the high offices and honourable deeds of several ancestors all at once. It's a debatable point whether even contemporary beholders would have been able to understand this plethora of allusions.



Denarius of C. Coelius Caldus, 51. Obverse: Head of consul C. Coelius Caldus with standard. Reverse: Altar and preparations for a meal.

Money for politics

The more generously politicians financed public investments with their own money, the more prestige they usually enjoyed. No matter whether the money was spent on lavish games, a costly building or the distribution of corn, the sponsor's descendants could be expected to still brag about those investments for a long time.

01

Money for politics

Generosity means prestige

Generosity was such a highly respected virtue that the Romans even had a goddess dedicated to this quality, liberalitas. As Liberalitas Augusti it later became a vital element in the imperial catalogue of virtues.



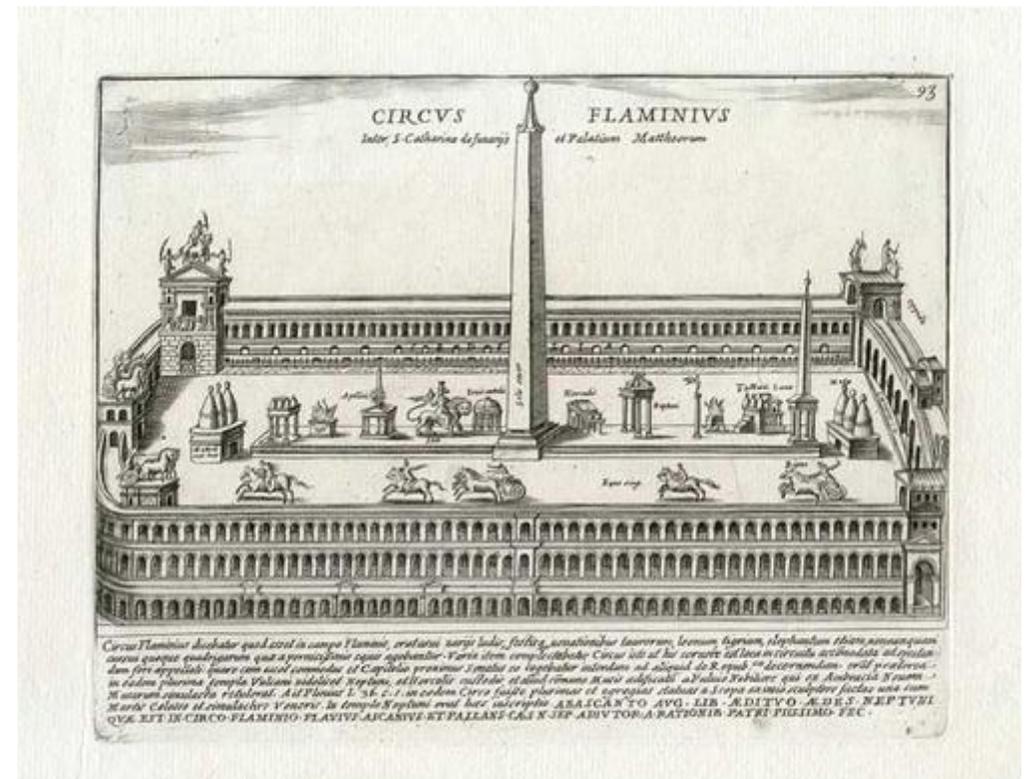
Denarius of Severus Alexander, 222–235. Reverse: Liberalitas with tessera and cornucopia on the left. From Gorny & Mosch auction sale 204 (2012), 2423.

02

Money for politics

People love generosity

In the Roman Republic, politicians had several options to express their generosity. As an integral part of Roman culture, circus games were a very effective public display of monetary benevolence. Expenses were usually only covered partly by the state, but the lion's share was raised by those who held the political offices, the aediles.



Fantasy picture, Circus Flaminius, Rome. From the *Romanae Magnitudinis Monumenta* by Pietro Santi Bartoli (1699). Source: Wikicommons.

03

Money for politics

Games to honour the gods I

The horse-riding jockey represented on these coins makes reference to the Ludi Appolinares, the games in honour of Apollo. Since Caius Calpurnius Piso had set the date in 211 BC, the games were celebrated annually from July 6 to July 13 in front of the Temple of Apollo on the Campus Martius. ...



Denarius of L. Calpurnius Piso Frugi, 90. Obverse: Apollo. Reverse: Jockey.

04

Money for politics

Games to honour the gods II

... Images like these could be used and recycled for a long time whenever one of the family members was running for office.



Denarius of C. Calpurnius Piso Frugi, 67. Obverse: Apollo. Reverse: Jockey.

05

Money for politics

The unofficial comitia

In theory, the Ludi Apollinares were first and foremost a religious celebration in the service of public health. However, in reality it was above all the entertainment factor which attracted enormous crowds to the Campus Martius, where they witnessed the gay and lavish games and chariot races or listened to lyrical competitions.



Finish of the chariot race, from: The Garden Arbor, 1880. Source: Wikicommons.

06

Money for politics

Where the crowds converge

On this map of Campus Martius it is easily recognisable that the Temple of Apollo (marked in red letters), next to which the Ludi Apollinares were held, is located on the fringe. This must be seen in the context of its construction: After a major plague epidemic, the temple had been built and dedicated to an Apollo Medicus, imported from Greece, in 431 BC.



Source: Wikicommons / Joris1919.

07

Money for politics

Panem et circenses

But Rome's politicians did not only provide games for the people, they also provided bread. At first, the Cura Annonae was established during famines in order to prevent speculation affecting corn prices: To this purpose, the aediles curules started out by buying corn from the surrounding Italian areas and reselling it to the Roman population at a low price. Since 210 BC, taxes were levied on corn from the Roman province of Sicily and, since 146 BC, the Roman province of Africa also had to deliver corn to Rome.



Corn on a bazaar in Tabriz/ Iran. Photo: Wikicommons / Oliver Weyer / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.de>

08

Money for politics

Providing for the capital

In the course of the Republic, corn consumption rose steadily. At the close of the Republic, there were 200,000 authorised and listed male recipients entitled to corn free of charge. The allocated share per month was 5 bushels of corn (modii), weighed roughly 33 kg and could feed two people.



Stubble field. Photo: Wikicommons / H.-J. Sydow.

09

Money for politics

Rome needs corn. Lots of corn.

Precisely this Cura Annonae is the theme of this coin, which depicts a corn bushel (modius) in the centre and flanking ears. The corn consumption of the Roman population is estimated at around 540,000 tons by several scholars. The corn was imported to Rome on ships via Ostia and other harbours. Having ancestors which had been responsible for the Cura Annonae in their position as praefectus was the best imaginable advertising for your own cause.



Denarius of L. Livineius Regulus, 42. Obverse: Head of Regulus.
Reverse: Modius and ear.

10

Money for politics

The ruins of an ancient corn distribution station

In the 1st century BC, these columns, later integrated into the Basilica of Saint Mary in Cosmedin, belonged to a *statio annonae*, one of the central corn distribution stations in Rome.



Maria in Cosmedin, columns of the Statio Annonae. Photo: Wikicommons / Agnete / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/deed.en>

11

Money for politics

Bread aplenty and a bold rewriting of history

This coin proves that history is always subject to novel interpretations. Lucius Minucius Augurinus, who had been called into office as praefectus annonae in 440/39, did such a horrifyingly lousy job that a private citizen by the name of Spurius Maelius decided to support the population himself by importing corn at his own cost. Augurinus, whose failure had been the sole reason for the intervention by Maelius, became so infuriated that he had Maelius killed. His ancestors reinterpreted the past by celebrating Augurinus for his heroic murder of a megalomaniac Plebeian and by representing him as distributing bread.



Denarius of C. Minucius Augurinus, 135. Obverse: Roma. Reverse: Columnia Minucia on the left; man handing out bread in front of it; Augurinus on the right.

12

Money for politics

Water for the people

With this portrait the Marcii celebrated Ancus Marcius, their ancestor and builder of Rome's third and longest water pipe, the Aqua Marcia. According to ancient reports, 187,600 cubic metres flowed through it daily and made it one of the most important of the eleven existing Roman aqueducts (until today).



Denarius of L. Marcius Philippus, 56. Obverse: Head of Ancius Marcus.
Reverse: Aqueduct, equestrian statue on top.

13

Money for politics

An ancient water pipe

The water flowing through the Aqua Marcia travelled 91 km from its source to the capital.



Source: Wikicommons / Coldeel.

14

Money for politics

Jupiter's will manifested in lightning bolts

This coin shows the four sides of the Puteal Scribonianum/Libonis, which is said to have been built by a member of the Libo family as the respective ancestors liked to point out. A three-dimensional replica of the puteal from Veii shows the original form as it has been reconstructed: The bidental (a sacred place that has been struck by lightning and is split in two) was enclosed by a bar decorated with garlands and lyres. What is more, each side also depicts a different symbol associated with Vulcan, the god of metallurgy and mythical blacksmith of Jupiter's lightning bolts, these being ...



Denarius of L. Scribonius Libo, 62. Common obverse: Head of Bonus Eventus. Reverse: Puteal Scribonianum with various symbols of Vulcan.

... hammer ...



Denarius of L. Scribonius Libo, 62. Common obverse: Head of Bonus Eventus. Reverse: Puteal Scribonianum with hammer as symbol of Vulcan.

16

Money for politics

... tongs...



Denarius of L. Scribonius Libo, 62. Common obverse: Head of Bonus Eventus. Reverse: Puteal Scribonianum with tongs as symbol of Vulcan.

17

Money for politics

... anvil ...



Denarius of L. Scribonius Libo, 62. Common obverse: Head of Bonus Eventus. Reverse: Puteal Scribonianum with anvil as symbol of Vulcan.

... as well as the pileus as headgear.



Denarius of L. Scribonius Libo, 62. Common obverse: Head of Bonus Eventus. Reverse: Puteal Scribonianum with pileus as symbol of Vulcan.

19

Money for politics

Divine tools for human work

This copperplate print from a 1689 book depicting the different trades illustrates that hammer, anvil and tongs were equally necessary tools for minting coins.



Copperplate engraving by Christoph Weigel, "Der Münzer" (The moneyer, 1698). Source: Wikicommons / Deutsche Fotothek.

Where does the money come from?

Being elected into a public office meant losing a lot of money. Only when the official was sent to conduct business or war abroad, was he able to make profits – legally or illegally.

01

Where does the money come from?

Rome's thirst for money

The Romans' greed for money often led to veritable wars of extinction. The politicians of the Roman Republic needed money galore – first for their candidature for political offices and then again once they held these offices.



Gun and coins. Photo: Wikicommons / Daniel D'Auria / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en>

02

Where does the money come from?

Introducing: Gaius Verres, art thief

That the governors who had moved out from Rome to their respective provinces led a dissolute life in every sense of the word quickly became common practice. Gaius Verres, governor of Sicily from 73 to 71 BC, was infamous and later tried for his corruptibility, money-hungry politics and large-scale blackmailing for artworks.



Map showing Gaius Verres's 'hauls'. Source: Wikicommons / mario / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/de/legalcode>

03

Where does the money come from?

Greed goes before a fall

Brought to trial by Cicero, Verres had to account for his doings in court. He lost the trial, was fined 3 million sesterces and retreated to exile in Massila (today's Marseille).



Bust of Cicero. Photo: Freud / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by->

04

Where does the money come from?

As avaricious as greedy

His greed was eventually his downfall: As the story goes, Marc Antony proscribed him because Verres allegedly refused to give up a handsome Corinthian vase.



Corinthian oinochoe, Amsterdam painter. Photo: Wikicommons / sailko / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.de>

05

Where does the money come from?

Rome taps into new sources of revenue

Rome's provinces, having to pay dues and taxes, were a more than lucrative source of money, while the citizens of Rome had been exempt from direct taxation since 167 BC. According to Plutarch, tax revenue from the provinces, before Pompey's conquering expeditions to the east, amounted to no less than 200 million sestertii. So Rome was evidently very interested in annexing further territories and turning them into provinces.



The Roman Empire in AD 117 reached its largest expansion around the time of Emperor Trajan's death. Source: Wikicommons / furfur / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en>

06

Where does the money come from?

The winner takes it all

But the available booty that a commander could make in a nice war was not to be scoffed at either. He alone decided how much of it would be given to his soldiers, how much saved for the triumphal procession and thus for the state treasury and how much would end up in his own pockets.



Booty from the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. Section from the Arch of Titus in Rome.

07

Where does the money come from?

Doomed to failure

Perseus of Macedon, who is depicted on this coin, did not stand a chance of averting war with Rome by negotiating. Macedonia was too rich. The Roman military commanders were after the money and the senate supported their actions. After the Battle of Pydna in 168 BC, Macedonia was first divided into four republics and later made a province of Rome.



Denarius of L. Aemilius Lepidus Paullus, 62. Obverse: Concordia. Reverse: Aemilius Paullus next to Macedonian trophy.

08

Where does the money come from?

The goddess of love as lucky charm

Many Roman coins evidence that military victories were often due to large cash flow. One example is this representation of the Temple of Venus on the cliff of Eryx, symbolic of Rome's first province Sicily. Rome did not only lay claim to Sicily's taxes and corn reserves but also to Sicilian gods. When Hannibal invaded Italy, the Romans dedicated a temple in Rome to the Venus Erycina in order to hold off the enemy.



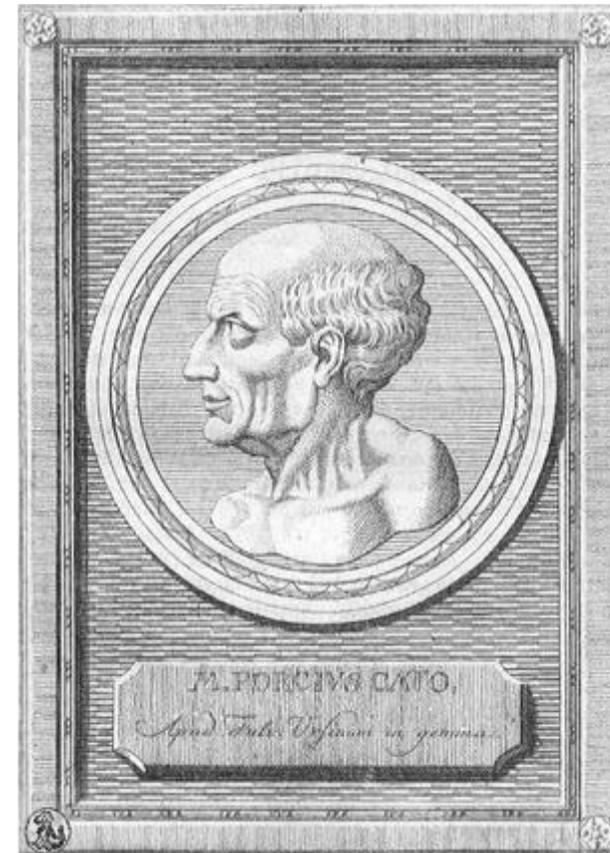
Denarius of C. Considius Nonianus, 57. Obverse: Venus. Reverse: Temple of Venus in Eryx and wall.

09

Where does the money come from?

He did not practise what he preached

Marcus Porcius Cato the Elder was widely known as the most dedicated moraliser in Rome and the unassailable moral authority representing the Roman aristocracy. However, even he, while at the same time promoting a return to more traditional values such as frugality and moderation, captured a lot of booty on his military expeditions abroad.



Cato the Elder, post-ancient engraving by an unknown engraver.
Source: Wikicommons / Dr. Manuel.

10

Where does the money come from?

Investing the war booty

This motif alludes to the consecration of a temple dedicated to Victoria Virgo by Cato the Elder in 193 BC. Cato had financed the construction with the war booty made on his campaign in Spain.



Quinarus of Marcus Porcius Cato, 89. Obverse: Liber. Reverse: Victoria with palm branch.

11

Where does the money come from?

Rich booty

There was a reason why Cyprus, Aphrodite's island, was believed to be particularly fertile and rich in natural resources due to its vast copper mines. The dissolution of the Kingdom of Cyprus generated no less than 168 million sesterces, which Cato brought back to Rome.



Copper nugget. Photo: Wikicommons / Ikiwaner / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en>

12

Where does the money come from?

When allies become enemies

The Aetolians experienced first-hand that breaking with Rome could be an expensive affair: After they had been loyal allies of Rome in the First and Second Macedonian War, they were merely treated as tedious supplicants after Flamininus's victory over Philip. When, in view of Rome's presumptuousness, they fought on the side of the Seleucidian king Antiochos in a consecutive war, Rome was affronted.



Map of Ancient Greece at the beginning of the Second Macedonian War, 200 BC. Source: Wikicommons / Marsyas/Lokiseinchef / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en>

13

Where does the money come from?

Renegades do not get away unscathed

The consequent defeat of the Aetolians in 189 BC by Rome is remembered on this coin in the form of these muse statues that were captured as war booty from the Temple of Hercules Musarum (the mythical ancestor of this moneyer) in Ambracia.



Denarius of Q. Pomponius Musa, 66. Obverse: Apollo. Reverse: Hercules Musagetes.

14

Where does the money come from?

Nine abducted muses

This particular representation of Hercules was considered the leader of the muses, whose famous statues had once been in the possession of the Aetolians and which were now transferred to Rome. On this coin you can see the statue of Urania, the muse of astronomy.



Denarius of Q. Pomponius Musa, 66. Obverse: Apollo. Reverse: The muse Urania.

15

Where does the money come from?

Plus interest and compound interest

The case of the Roman province of Asia illustrates just how much of a financial burden a Roman victory could be for the defeated party. After Mithridates's defeat, Sulla imposed reparation payments in the amount of 20,000 talents, the equivalent of 120 million denarii. Of course this demand exceeded the financial reserves of the concerned cities. They had to borrow money. Roman bankers were more than happy to help out and, only 14 years later, the province's debt, including interest and compound interest, had risen and sextupled to 120,000 talents.



Being the residence of his enemy Mithridates, Pergamon suffered even more than the other cities from Sulla's repressions. But, just like the rest of the province, it would thrive again later and, in the 2nd century AD, it had grown into an impressive sight. Photo: Wladyslaw Sojka / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.de>

16

Where does the money come from?

A merciful victor

Roman general Lucullus had mercy and wiped out the debt, which resulted in a petition by Roman money lenders to withdraw Lucullus from Asia. The bankers convinced the senate and Lucullus returned to Rome, the Eternal City, in 66 BC. Even though he was never again trusted with a military campaign due to his foreigner-friendly attitude, he had made enough money on his expeditions to erect several sumptuous villas and turn his name into a synonym for an epicurean lifestyle.



Christmas version (with speculoos instead of normal biscuits) of the German dessert 'Kalter Hund', also known as Lukullus. Even today, a gourmet meal is still referred to as a 'Lucullan meal'. Photo: Politikaner / <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>