

Rome: Transition from Republic to Empire

Paul A. Bishop

Introduction

Since its collapse, historians have attempted to explain the struggle for power and control over both the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire that followed. To explain the complexities of the Roman Republic, the Empire, and their political complexities can be a daunting task. For nearly ten centuries Rome would rule most of the known world before the fall of the Western Empire (Byzantine) in 476 C.E.

Before that fall occurred, a fundamental change would take place that would transform the original Republic into the Roman Empire. Many factors would be directly and indirectly responsible for this transition. These would lead the Romans from civil war to intrigue and back again as the Republic evolved and was transformed into an empire.

ROMAN FACTIONS and OFFICES

- Republic – government of elected representatives of the people with no monarch.
- Patricians – elite families or aristocracy who made up the members of the Roman Senate.
- Plebeians – general body of Roman citizens distinct from the privileged aristocracy who made up the assemblies.
- Senate – main governing body of both the Republic and the Empire made up of noble aristocrats with appropriate financial and property qualifications.
- Consul – highest elected Roman official acting as both civil and military magistrate
- Tribune – official of the Plebeian assembly and magistrate to protect the peoples rights.
- Dictator – Senate appointed extraordinary magistrate to act in times of crisis.
- Imperator – originally equivalent to title of “commander”, in English – “emperor”.
- Princeps – official title of a Roman emperor, meaning “first citizen”.
- Augustus – title of authority over humanity, religious title meaning “the illustrious one”.
- Censor – high ranking magistrate responsible for the census and public morality.
- Optimates – pro-aristocratic faction in favor of extending the power of the Senate.
- Populares – aristocratic faction who favored the Assembly to break Senate power.
- Tetrarchy – the separation of authority between four emperors within a divided empire.
- Annuality – the Roman policy of serving one year in an office of post of government.
- Collegiality – the Roman policy of having dual members serve in the same post to insure the check on power.

The Roman Republic and Law

By the sixth century B.C.E., the Etruscan kings had created expanding confederacies that grew in power to control much of the middle Italian peninsula as well as the Island of Corsica. As late as the third century B.C.E., the Etruscan kings were known to have been the dominant power over Rome. With the sacking of the wealthy Etruscan city of Veii in 396 B.C.E., the Romans were able to throw off their Etruscan oppressors and begin to establish themselves on the peninsula. This led to the founding of their own independent kingdom, which would last until the establishment of the Roman Republic around 509 B.C.E.

The arbitrary actions of the Etruscan kings had been the great contention for the Romans as they struggled to expand and establish themselves on the Italian peninsula. Roman distain for the Etruscans and their rule had increased as Rome began to establish its own social and economic dominance. By the time the Romans had overpowered the Etruscans, they had come to an understanding that the basic principles of law were necessary to curb the ambitions of the powerful, whether they be Etruscan kings, or rulers of their own making. Their further concern was with that of overwhelming personal power in the hands of the few. The government they developed would look to address and restrain these problems.

The Roman Republic would therefore develop under a system of government that would divide power among two consuls, a Senate, and the Plebeian Assembly. Republicanism therefore came to embody the idea of representative government. This would last for over 450 years until its ultimate demise resulting from a series of civil wars and subversions. By that time, the Republic had extended its control throughout the Mediterranean Sea and as far as Britain. That control would operate under an informal unwritten constitution, and establish the use of Latin as its official language, while codifying rights, responsibilities, and status under a written law.

Beginning with the Law of the Twelve Tables, Roman jurisprudence would develop over the next one thousand years into a legal system that would eventually become the early basis for law in continental Europe. Even English and North American “common law” owes more than a passing debt to the Romans. Case law and precedents find their roots in a Latin legal term, *stare decisis*, meaning “to stand by things decided”. The development of a written law was seen as a method of eliminating indiscriminant application of the law by magistrates and officials upon the lower plebeian class.

The Assemblies

The establishment of a written law set the foundation for a republican government whereby responsibilities and duties would be divided among various representative assemblies. Their members would in turn cast votes concerning the action to be taken in

regard to the issues placed before them. Membership in these early assemblies would be limited by such things as class, income, family ties, and affiliations. The assemblies had various and specific functions within the Roman republican structure.

The two most powerful bodies among the assemblies were the Plebeian Assembly, and the Roman Senate. Established as an act of compromise between the patricians (aristocracy) and the plebeians (common citizens) after a military revolt, the Plebeian Council had the power to pass laws and deal with civil litigation until Sulla, as dictator, established permanent courts in the first century B.C.E. The assembly would meet at the request and under the supervision of a *Tribune* (tribal leader), an elected magistrate who served for one year and was responsible for monitoring judicial decisions made by the assembly. The Plebeian Assembly would eventually become the favored legislature of the Roman Republic. By 287 B.C.E., its legislation would become binding over the entire Republic and would come to influence actions taken by the Senate. One oddity concerning the “people’s” assemblies was that they could not debate on motions and issues brought before them, but rather had to vote to accept or reject them.

The Senate

The Roman Senate was the main governing body for both the Roman Republic as well as for the later Roman Empire. The *Senatus*, or Council of Elders was one of the three branches of government as set out by the constitution of the Roman Republic. The Roman Senate had the greatest influence and power over Roman politics. It was the official body of the government that was responsible for sending and receiving ambassadors and appointing provincial governors, among other things. The Senate also conducted war, appropriated public funds, and issued currency. It did not, however have legislative or executive powers until the 2nd Century C.E., thus all its propositions first had to be ratified by the peoples assemblies. However, due to its immense prestige, and the fact that all elected officials were Senators, nearly all Senate consultations were enacted as a matter of course.

The Senate was further empowered to authorize the nomination of a dictator to deal with state emergencies. This was seen as an extreme measure, whereby a magistrate was given extraordinary authority as “*dictator*”. This “supreme magistrate” would possess unquestioned authority for a short time to handle important matters of state safety. The dictator thus served as both chief executive of the government and supreme commander of the army. Dictatorships were limited to six months, but generally the official resigned the office immediately upon the conclusion of the business for which he had been appointed. The practice was shunned during the later half of the Republic, as the Senate began to opt to avoid dictatorships by declaring “martial law”. The Senate then would move to empower consuls, who were the highest elected political and military magistrates, to protect the safety of the Republic.

Power within the Roman Republic and its higher offices was limited and checked though a system of collegiality, the holding of the same office by at least two men, as found in the case of magistrates and consuls. In this manner it was felt that the tyranny of individuals could be checked. Also, the early Republic had no “standing army”, reducing both the cost and internal threat to the state. Consuls, of which there were always two,

held a veto vote over any action taken by the other consul. This dual power extended to the military, as each would alternate leadership on the battlefield. This allowed the Republic to have strong leadership, and yet still maintain a sense of checking control.

Growing Dissension

During the later years of the Republic divisions began to develop within the Senate as two competing factions arose. The *Optimates* held to traditional forms of Roman government, while the *Populares* stressed the growing strength of the Plebeian Assembly as the binding law and authority of the Republic. In turn, conflicts began to grow between the Plebeian Assembly and the Senate, which controlled the Republic's finances. Still, enough checks were in place to ensure the political safety of the Republic.

By the 2nd Century B.C.E., social, economic, and political discord saw the end of centuries of relatively peaceful governance. Reforms under Tiberius and Gaius looked to address the conditions of the poor and the disenfranchised, but had the effect of building growing animosity between the plebeians and patricians. The Social War in the 1st Century BCE between Rome and her city allies over wealth sharing and reform, further ripped at the thinning fabric of the Republic. Finally, the Catilinarian Conspiracy, in the 1st century B.C.E., saw an open attempt to forcefully overthrow the Roman Republic. Unsuccessful as it was, the conspiracy was an insight to the growing internal problems of the Roman Republic.

As Roman expansion had quickened, new wealth was brought into the Republic at an ever increasing rate. The economy thus changed from one based on land-ownership toward a money-based economy. This weakened the landed aristocracy's position in society and brought about a decline in their confidence in the Republic. In the midst of this there was an attempt by economically depressed aristocrats (mostly senators) to push through legislation granting a sweeping debt cancellation plan. While the plan was checked by clever political maneuvering on the part of consul Cicero, it showed that a clear shift had taken place within Roman politics. The traditional policy of compromise had now been replaced with one of self-interest, and this would have a long-term affect upon the Roman Republic.

By the end of the Punic Wars with Carthage, Roman economics has seen a concentration of wealth toward the more powerful Roman clans in Rome. In turn, these clans were able to take possession of much of the newly conquered territories. Further, as military campaigns began to extend into years, some middle-class soldiers found themselves landless as their fallow (unplanted) lands were lost to debt creditors. In many cases wealthy landholders consolidated these lands into their growing estates. Even as the situation worsened, the chance for land reform became less likely as wealthy patrician senators, who were benefiting from these conditions, looked to maintain the status quo.

When a land reform bill was introduced by the tribune Tiberius Cracchus in 133 B.C.E., the Senate blocked its funding by bribing the other tribune to block Tiberius' bill. Tiberius then looked to have his colleague deposed, violating the principle of *collegiality*. Seeing his time as tribune would end before the land-reform bill could pass, Tiberius determined to run again for office as tribune, therefore violating the principle of *annuality*. The patricians then began to label Tiberius Cracchus as a tyrant. Soon he

would be assassinated in the streets of Rome with three hundred of his associates. When Tiberius brother Gaius attempted to revive land-reform years later, he would meet the same fate. Gaius Cracchus was murdered along with 3,000 of his followers on the famous Capitoline Hill in Rome.

These events cast a growing shadow over the Roman Republic and Roman politics in general. The political traditions of Rome had now been broken, self-interest had become rampant within the assemblies and the Senate, and mob violence, political treachery, and murder had become the new tools of Roman political life. Coupled with the social and economic turmoil that Rome faced, the Republic would be hard pressed to endure. By the end of the Jugurthine War at the end of the 1st century B.C.E., it became clear that Roman ethics had also been corrupted, as Juygurtha had been able to payoff Roman military and civil officials in his bid to gain power in Numidia.

Civil War and Revolt

By the time Gaius Marius became a consul in 107 B.C.E., opposition to reform was widespread within the Senate. Nevertheless, Marius reorganized the military by allowing landless citizens to join the army in return for land as a retirement pension. He then created a professional army with standardized training and equipment that was more effective for waging the growing number of extended military campaigns the Republic was involved in. Because their pensions were tied to the conquered territories, these professional soldier's loyalties were joined to the generals under whom they served in order to receive those pensions. Thus Rome's armies became more the property of her generals rather than being loyal to the state. As growing conflict led to open confrontation, the change in military loyalties would set the stage for the demise of the Roman Republic.

With the expansion of military opportunity, there was a new call for extending citizenship to the Roman ally cities on the Italian peninsula. Also, they demanded greater sharing of conquest wealth. When Rome refused, this erupted into the Social War of the 1st Century B.C.E., as Rome was forced to put down a general rebellion among her allied Italian cities. The Social War would see the rise of Lucius Sulla to both military and political power as he led the southern Legions to victory during the rebellion. Marius had returned from retirement to lead the northern Legions. Once the Social War was ended, this created a power duel between the two commanders.

The Republic soon fell into full-scale civil war, requiring Sulla to direct his Legions against Marius' supporters holding Rome. Sulla became the first general to lead Roman legions against the city of Rome itself. The war would rage on for one and a half years before Sulla prevailed. He then carried out a series of purges to remove his enemies, a political tool that was becoming more and more common in the Republic. With much of his opposition removed and an air of terror instilled, Sulla was appointed dictator, whereby he then doubled the size of the Senate and gave it veto power over the Plebeian Assembly, in effect changing the balance of power in the government. At the same time, this gave him overwhelming support from the Senate. He also stripped the tribunes of much of their power, while limiting the powers of provincial governors. Sulla would resign his dictatorship for a consulship and then retire, but the precedence had

been set. Within the next decade, Sulla's march on Rome would be repeated again and again as first Marcus Lepidus and then Pompey Magnus would march armies on the city of Rome in attempts to seize power.

The Roman Republic would be rocked at its core by a slave revolt in 73 B.C.E. Led by a gladiator named Spartacus, some 70,000 slaves and gladiators would carry their rebellion across the Italian peninsula. In the process their numbers would swell to over 100,000 and they would defeat no less than five Roman Legions in battle before the revolt was ultimately crushed by combined Legions under Crassus and Pompey. The revolt, known as the Third Servile War was a clear indication that the Republic had lost its hold on even the most controlled of its inhabitants. Crassus and Pompey would then march their armies to the walls of Rome and demand to be made consuls. In the face of this threat, the Senate appointed both men to office. With these developments the existence of a true republican government existed in name only.

Pompey would go on to greater military fame as he was given extraordinary military command over Roman forces to deal with long standing troubles in Armenia and with Mediterranean piracy. Within a year of assuming command, not only had Pompey crushed these two trouble spots, he had also conquered the entire eastern coast of the Mediterranean and brought it under Roman rule. Through this acquisition, he had also doubled the income of the Roman state and in the process had become the wealthiest man in Rome.

Conspiracy and the Rise of Caesar

The next threat to the Republic would come in the form of a conspiracy. Led by Lucius Catilina, the renewed call for debt absolution would fan the flames of discontent among the Assembly and the Senate alike. Catilina would spread his conspiracy by recruiting many like himself who had suffered political defeat and been expelled from government. He was also able to recruit outcast military men to spread the conspiracy throughout Italy. Catilina looked to spread civil unrest across the countryside while instigating a slave uprising. He then planned to set fire to Rome, assassinate a number of senators, and then seize power in the midst of the turmoil. His supporters in the Senate would then look to appoint him as dictator, and with his forces already in place, he would quickly quell the unrest, and then appear to be the new champion of the Republic. Catilina's plan began to unravel when Marcus Cicero discovered the conspiracy, avoided assassination, and informed the greater Senate of the plot. Cicero then moved to execute the conspirators, while Catiline was to die in battle. But the dice had been cast, now the Republic was having to fight forces from within its very own government.

At this point Julius Caesar was to take advantage of the political unrest and military adversarial conditions which existed between Pompey and Marcus Crassus. The three would form an alliance known as the 1st Triumvirate. Together they would dominate Roman politics, beginning with Caesar's election as consul in 59 B.C.E. Pompey and Crassus followed as consuls when Caesar was appointed to a provincial governorship in Gaul. Caesar was very successful in Gaul, both militarily and economically. With the death of Crassus, the Triumvirate became a power struggle and rivalry between Caesar and Pompey. Caesar was ordered by the Senate to return to Rome and disband his army.

When this did not happen, Pompey accused Caesar of insubordination and the Senate moved to back Pompey by giving him absolute authority to defend the Republic. Civil war was soon to begin.

Caesar entered Italy and swept his armies down the peninsula meeting little resistance and took Rome itself without opposition. He then attempted to engage Pompey's forces in southern Italy, but Pompey's army was able to escape to Greece. He eventually defeated Pompey's forces in Greece, then pursued him into Egypt, where Pompey was assassinated by the presiding king of that Roman client state. Julius Caesar now became undisputed ruler of the Roman world.

Caesar had gained some political clout by disbanding his armies upon his return to Rome, and by granting wide sweeping pardons toward his adversaries. In 45 B.C.E., he was appointed dictator for ten years. In the following year he accepted the appointment of dictator for life. This produced a multiple political dilemma for the Republic. First, all political power was now concentrated in the hands of Caesar for the indefinite future. This would subordinate the Senate and its authority to his command for all intensive purposes. Also, this situation of near absolute authority would remain with Caesar until his death, effectively making the Senate little more than a rubber stamp. Some historians mark this as the end of the Roman Republic.

As Julius Caesar began to centralize the government and take greater command of authority and institute reforms, his position with the Senate grew ominous. A plan was soon hatched within the Senate to assassinate Caesar for his dishonor toward the Senate and in order to save the Republic. When Julius Caesar was called to the Forum to sign a petition to restore Senate power, the conspirators fell upon him and murdered him. This act would set the stage for the 2nd Triumvirate and a series of further civil wars, which would ultimately lead to the demise of the Republic and the formation of the Roman Empire.

Octavian and the Pax Romana

Octavian was then named as Julius Caesar's political heir, but to assure his power against a now distrusted Senate, Octavian would form an alliance with Marcus Antonius (Mark Antony) and Marcus Lepidus. This 2nd Triumvirate then pursued Caesar's assassins into Greece and defeated their forces. The new Triumvirate then issued *proscriptions* against some 300 Senators, confiscating much of their wealth and property, with more than a few being put to death as "enemies of the state". This was the fate of Cicero, who had been asked to join the 1st Triumvirate, but had declined because he saw it as a subversion of the Republic. The confiscated property of the deposed senators was then used to pay the Legions that had helped in the destruction of the assassins and conspirators.

The 2nd Triumvirate was to collapse much like the first one. With the division of territory and power, Lepidus, who had been deputy to Julius Caesar, was relegated to control of Hispania (Spain) and Africa. Eventually his legions would desert him in favor of Octavian, robbing Lepidus of the last of his military and political power. Lepidus would be accused of attempted rebellion during his campaign in Sicily and forced to

retire in exile, leaving Octavian and Mark Antony to battle for supremacy. That showdown would take place with the Battle of Actium.

In 31 B.C.E., some 200 senators, or approximately one third of the Senate threw their support behind the popular Mark Antony. This led Octavian to understand he would have to have a complete military victory in order to secure supreme power. But first he began a propaganda campaign, accusing Mark Antony with anti-Roman designs. Mark Antony's affair with the Egyptian empress Cleopatra, and his desire to be buried with her in Alexandria and not in Rome, invoked the rage of the Senate. War was declared on Egypt and Cleopatra for despoiling Mark Antony. Both sides began to assemble their forces, estimated to have numbered around 400,000 combined. Once both armies had move into Greece the battle ground was set.

Because he had a superior navy, Octavian wanted to face Mark Antony on the open sea. This came to pass after months of attrition warfare, as each side looked to wear the other down. When Mark Antony moved his fleet through the straits passed Actium, Octavian saw his chance. As the naval battle turned against Mark Antony, Cleopatra and her support fleet raced for the open sea. She was soon followed by Mark Antony in a smaller command vessel as he abandoned his fleet. The entire fleet would find its way to the bottom of the sea by the end of the day. Antony's land forces, having had their supply lines cut by Caesar's second in command Agrippa, and watching their leader escape to the sea, would then surrender to Octavian. By the following year, Octavian had trapped Mark Antony and Cleopatra and laid siege to their remaining forces at Alexandria where the two would commit suicide.

Octavian had now secured near total military power within the Republic. Next he moved to reinforce his political power. First, he began to appoint provincial governors that were loyal to him. This insured that he would not only have support in the provinces, but would also reduce the risk of having any threat to his authority materializing in the provinces without his knowledge. This was particularly important in the frontier provinces, where battle hardened and ready armies might be led by power usurping generals looking to gain supremacy.

The next move was to reorganize the Senate. By purging the Senate of its unreliable and untrustworthy members, Octavian was able to replace them with his own supporters. The majority of these he took from the provinces, most of which were outside of the Roman aristocracy. As not to appear the tyrant, he left the institutions of the Republic intact, but now most power rested with Octavian and he tactfully influenced consuls, tribunes, legislation, and decisions. In effect, Octavian thus created a principate, whereby even though he was not officially the head of state, he dominated the new political regime that he alone had created.

Octavian's skill lie in the fact that through attrition he was able to gain complete control of the Republic, while wowing the support of the Senate and people and still appearing to uphold the political traditions of the Republic. To the Senate and to the people, Octavian was careful not to appear to be aiming to establish a dictatorship or monarchy. His appointment by the Senate as duel consul with his leading general Agrippa had been the first step toward imperial power, but through the traditional political avenues. Rome would not submit to the rule of a despot, and Octavian had no desire to be one.

By the time Octavian moved to gain control of the Republic, the Roman state was war weary. The repeated civil wars had drained the Republic both politically and financially and within the provinces, sporadic violence and crime was becoming a common occurrence. Octavian moved to return Rome to a state of peaceful stability and traditional legality. Further, he looked to ensure free elections and allow the court system to operate without undue political pressure. When he formally turned power back over to the Senate by surrendering control of the provinces, he in effect gave up military command. This act further endeared him to the people, even though the Senate still had little legislative power beyond what Octavian initiated.

The true source of Octavian's power was never in question. His network of patron–client relationships insured political and military loyalty and support, and his immense private fortune maintained that support. These resources are what led the Senate to propose to return control of the provinces to Octavian, which also returned military power to him. Once again he was in control of the majority of the provinces and legions in the Republic, this through the willingness of the Senate. In 27 B.C.E., the Senate took the next step by giving Octavian the titles of *Augustus* and *Princeps*, and appointing him to a permanent consulship.

These new titles, the first denoting religious authority over humanity overshadowed his former constitutional position. As *Princeps*, he now became “the first head” and most distinguished of Roman politicians. Octavian would soon become known as the *Impertor Caesar Augustus*. *Impertor* now denoted his office as commander, *Caesar* signifying his heredity, and *Augustus* proclaiming his supremacy.

History shows that Caesar Augustus would usher in an extended period of peace and prosperity. This period known as the *Pax Romana* would last over two centuries and see the Republic become the greatest empire the world had ever seen. The Republic was in essence converted into an empire, even though the republican facade remained to cover up the fact. Caesar Augustus would give up his consulship in favor of an *imperium proconsulare*, which allowed him to retain control over the provinces while seeming to be relinquishing overall power.

With every step Caesar Augustus set the pattern for those who were to follow as Roman emperors. As he would turn over power, the Senate would move to entrench his authority even more. When the Senate granted him the power of a tribune, his power over the empire became absolute. Now he controlled the provinces, the armies, and the power to convene the Senate. He also had the authority to determine the Senate's business, and veto the actions taken by both the Senate and the Assembly. Augustus presided over elections as well, and had the right to speak first at assemblages. He also held the powers of a Roman *ensor*. These included the right to oversee public morals and examine the law in the public's interest. Lastly, he held the authority to determine the membership of the Senate through census.

The period of the *Pax Romana* would far outlive Augustus. During its run, the Roman Empire would continue to expand, but following emperors would be less concerned with conquest and more concerned with the “management” of existing territory within the empire. Generals were brought under stricter control to limit their political ambitions and the borders of the empire were placed under greater scrutiny.

Under these more peaceful circumstances, commerce thrived and building throughout the empire increased. More wealth was concentrated within the empire as

military expenditures lessened. Piracy was almost eliminated and the threat of invasion vanished. While there was still plenty of warfare along the borders, they were secure enough to remove any threat to the interior provinces. Therefore the lives of the majority of citizens in the empire were spent in peace during the Pax Romana.

Internal dissension still existed, but the threat of civil war was not present and the Romans were able to handle political unrest within the noble class through the affairs of the state. While the Roman Empire could never truly be considered free from war, overall the empire experienced a lasting period of relative tranquility. The “Ara Pacis” (Alter of Peace) was constructed to celebrate the peace and prosperity that Augustus had brought to Rome.

By the time Caesar Augustus died in 14 C.E., he had established the imperial foundation that had replaced the Republic with the Roman Empire. He created a method for the progressive consolidation of power and office, which was going to be repeatedly followed by succeeding emperors. His title of supremacy - Augustus, and his hereditary title of Caesar would become the permanent titles of the leaders of the Roman Empire for centuries to come. That empire would grow into the dynastic and imperial succession that would stem from Caesar Augustus’ rule.

The Tetrarchy and the Division of the Empire

The title denotes the “Later Roman Empire”. By the 3rd Century C.E., internal dissension had again arisen in the empire, and rogue elements within the military threatened the stability of the state. When Diocletian came to power in 284 C.E., he would move to end the power struggles that had dominated the empire during the proceeding fifty years. Once appointed Augustus, Diocletian looked to consolidate his power in the east by placing his strongest rivals in imperial positions. He chose not to hold council in Rome, which had lost much of its importance by this time with the wide expansion of the empire.

In the west, the general Maximian was doing the same, putting down revolt and strengthening his own claims to power. Realizing that the empire had grown to large for a single administration, Diocletian declared Maximian as his Caesar. The idea of dual leadership and sharing of power had been introduced by Caesar Augustus when he palced his general Agrippa in a position of power. Maximian would soon take the title of Augustus for himself and then use that authority independent of Diocletian to subdue the western portion of the empire. It is believed that Diocletian did not challenge Maximian’s move, to avoid another civil war.

The two emperors then worked in concert to bring the empire back under imperial rule. With coordinated military campaigns, they systematically subjugated the empire back under their control. They then each appointed Caesars to act as their heirs and to share authority. This allowed for closer administration of the empire and created a line of succession. Galerius and Constantine were chosen for the positions and given territories to administer within the empire.

The governing of the empire was now transformed to consist of two senior and two junior emperors, the tetrarchy. The word means “divided into four” in Greek. The new styled emperors then moved within their administrative territories, each with their own

imperial courts and armies. Each emperor held nearly complete authority within their own realms within the empire. Their authority drew on a display of republican practices and observances, but ultimately their power was found in their control of their legions.

Diocletian then came to believe that this system would eventually revert the empire back toward its previous disorder. To avoid this, he moved to divide the empire in two, with an Eastern and Western partition. The new empires would be administered separate from one another, but would act in cooperation as a whole. Diocletian's further reforms removed much of the remaining republican vestiges. He adopted the new title of "Dominus" (lord) and had a throne constructed from which he sat in rule over his territories.

Diocletian would voluntarily give up power as a symbolic gesture of resignation. He was the only emperor ever to do this, as all others before him had either died in office, or been removed by force. His reforms would allow the empire to prosper and exist for several more centuries. However, the partition would ultimately become a permanent split and internal civil war would return.

While the division of the Empire into two parts had led to greater political stability, it had also weakened the overall combined strength of the Empire. This coupled with the end of extended expansion led to a slow stagnation of economic growth. The Roman Republic and Empire had been predicated on the economic wealth that expansion brought.

The Western Empire would soon begin to be overrun by barbarian invaders, who would sweep through the Italian peninsula and sack Rome several times. The Eastern Empire would become known as the Byzantine Empire. Its fortunes would allow it to maintain its borders militarily, but it would begin to transform internally as eastern influences changed its culture.

Under Justinian, the Eastern Empire would rise to restore the greatness that was once Rome. Justinian would send his legions westward and recapture much of what had been the Western Empire. Justinian would be the last great "Roman Emperor" as he was able to reestablish Roman domination in the west. While the newly restored empire would slowly lose control of territories in the west over the next centuries, the eastern Byzantine Empire would last for another thousand years, the last vestiges of what had once been the world's greatest empire – the Roman Empire.

Conclusions

The Republic had lasted for nearly five hundred years, and gone through several transitions as it evolved. These included the transfer of power from one political institution to another as they vied for control of the state, to outright civil war as attempts were made to take control with military force. Appointed dictators came and went as Rome tried to solve its internal problems with temporarily amassed power, only to see the rise of military despots. The fight for control under the existing Republic ultimately demanded a conversion toward empire and even this brought turmoil.

Finally, Augustus was able to consolidate authority and power under one controlling office, with the support of the Senate. This produced a workable relationship with a near omnipotent leader working more or less with a restricted republican

government. Eventually internal instability would return, and coupled with the size of the empire, would require a division into the Eastern and Western Empires under Diocletian. This led to restructuring of governmental control under the Tetrarchy.

The Romans had taken the Greek model of government and reproduced it on a grand scale. It had worked as long as political power had been checked. However, with the expansion of the military beyond the control of the Senate and into the hands of individual generals, the days of the Republic had become numbered. With the passing of the Republic, the Empire would eventually fall prey to the ambitions of individuals more concerned with personal power and glory, than with the health and well being of the state. Still, the Romans found their greatest peace and prosperity at the hands of an omnipotent ruler – Octavian.

Questions

1. *The Roman Republic was made up of various interacting officials and assemblies. Explain and describe the various offices that comprised the Roman Republic. How did these check each others power and restrain tyranny?*
2. *The Roman loathing of tyranny and monarchy are well documented. What were collegiality and annuality and how did these control Roman magistrates?*
3. *With the advent of the 1st Triumvirate the Roman Republic began to feel the pressure of empire. Why could this triad be considered the beginning of the end of the Republic? How did this set the stage for the Republic's downfall?*
4. *With the end of the 2nd Triumvirate, the Republic would come to an end. How did Octavian put himself into a position of dominance to force the Senate's hand? What offices and powers brought him to become Caesar Augustus and to assume supreme authority in what would know become the Roman Empire?*

Further Reading and Credits

For a clear understand of the Roman constitution, see Andrew Lintott, The Constitution of the Roman Republic (Oxford, 2003). The chronological order of events is well documented in The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Republic (Cambridge, 2004). There is also a nice explanation of the Roman magistrate system, Robert Broughton, The Magistrates of the Roman Republic (Chicago,1984). Explanation of the rise of Julius Caesar and the 1st Triumvirate can be found in, The Civil Wars: Julius Caesar (Harvard, 2006). The 2nd Triumvirate and Octavian are well covered in, Fiona Forsyth Augustus: The First Emperor (New York, 2003). While older, Sir Charles Chadwick produced an excellent compilation, Seven Roman Statesmen of the later Republic: The Cracchi, Sulla, Crassus, Cato, Pompey, Caesar, (London, 1902).