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Week 2: HW Paper

Roman governance, provinces, social class, slavery

The Roman Republic, (509–27 BCE), was centered in the city of Rome that began in 509 BCE, when the Romans replaced their monarchy with elected magistrates, and the beginning of the Roman Empire. The early Roman Republic (509–264 BCE) and the preceding regal period (753–509 BCE) are the most poorly documented periods of Roman history. According to tradition, the first six kings had been benevolent rulers, but the last was a cruel tyrant who was overthrown by a popular uprising. According to the ancient historians, these changes resulted from a political clash between two social orders, the patricians and the plebeians, that lasted for more than 200 years.

The two consuls were generals whose task it was to lead Rome's armies in war. In times of military emergency, when unity of command was sometimes necessary, Rome appointed a dictator in place of the consuls, who could not hold supreme military command for longer than six months.

The Roman provinces were the administrative regions of the Roman Empire outside of Italy that were controlled by the Romans under the Empire. Each province was ruled by a Roman appointed governor. A province was the largest territorial and administrative unit of the empire's territorial possessions outside Italy.

Provinces were generally governed by politicians of senatorial rank, usually former consuls or former praetors. A later exception was the province of Egypt, which was incorporated by Augustus after the death of Cleopatra and was ruled by a governor of only equestrian rank. That exception was unique but not contrary to Roman law, as Egypt was considered Augustus's personal property, following the tradition of the kings of the earlier Hellenistic period.

Social class in ancient Rome was hierarchical. An individual's relative position in one might be higher or lower than in another, which complicated the social composition of Rome. The status of freeborn Romans during the Republic was established by: Ancestry (patrician or plebeian); Census rank based on wealth and political privilege, with the senatorial and equestrian ranks elevated above the ordinary citizen; Gender; and Citizenship, of which there were grades with varying rights and privileges. The different Roman classes varied in rights and privileges, voting rights, marriage rights, and other allowances.

Slavery in ancient Rome played an important role in society and the economy. Besides manual labor, slaves performed many domestic services, and were also employed at highly skilled jobs and professions. Accountants and physicians were often slaves. Unskilled slaves, or those sentenced to slavery as punishment, worked on farms, in mines, and at mills.

Slaves were considered property under Roman law and had no legal personhood. Most slaves would never be freed. Unlike Roman citizens, they could be subjected to corporal punishment, sexual exploitation, torture and summary execution. Over time, however, slaves gained increased legal protection, including the right to file complaints against their masters.