

NOTES ON QUIZ 1

1 What kind of role did the senate play in the Republic? In what ways was it a different kind of body from the comitia centuriata?

The senate was an advisory body consisting of an elder from the most important Roman families, especially the priesthood-holding families that became the patricians. The senate had no political power; it could only issue advisory decrees (called *senatus consultum*). But their collective prestige and their members' role in providing religious advice provided them with great influence, gaining them a sense of responsibility for protecting Rome's customs and traditions. In addition, because the elected magistrates served for only one year and so were largely focused on short-term needs and crises, it fell to the senate to consider long-term policy, especially concerning foreign affairs.

Roman assemblies were meetings of the citizen body, with the power to vote on laws and elect magistrates. Unlike the senate, these assemblies had sovereign constitutional power to govern Rome. Nonetheless, these assemblies were weighted to favor the wealthiest classes.

They voted in special groups, each group getting one vote. The centuriate assembly was essentially the citizen army meeting as a legislature. Vote was by century, and the 193 centuries were ordered and weighted by census class (the poorest with little or no landed property were lumped into a single century, the proletariat, while the upper centuries were populated by the richest citizens). For these reasons, measures could pass solely with the support of the elite.

(The tribal assembly met in the Forum and had power over domestic affairs and election of the other magistracies. Vote was by tribe, and the 35 tribes were ordered and weighted by census class—the lower classes were lumped into the four “urban tribes”, leaving the “rural tribes” in the hands of the rich estate-holders— so that measures could pass solely with the support of the elite.)

2 Describe the function and power of the *paterfamilias*.

The *paterfamilias* was the senior male figure in an extended family (all those connected by a vertical male bloodline). According to custom and law, the *paterfamilias* was the owner of all the family's property, and the sole representative of its interests to the public. All that happened within the family—private matters, as contrasted with public matters (*res publica*)—were entirely in the hands of the *paterfamilias*, who had complete power (*patria potestas*) of justice and disposition over all the men, women, children, freedmen, slaves, and possessions of his bloodline, up to and including the right to execute or sell into slavery.

In practice this absolute power was mitigated by the need to consider the reputation of the family within the community, and by the advice of the family council and of the senior matron of the family.

EC1 The significance of the Twelve Tables is that they

(c) publicly established in principle the equality of all free citizens before the law

EC2 What strikes you as being the most important aspect of the Romans' attitude toward religion? Discuss examples of what you mean.

There are a number of possible responses, including a focus on the Romans' need to consult the gods before undertaking public actions; the resulting politicization of the state religion and the political empowerment of the priests and the families that controlled the priesthoods (the patricians); the contrast between the state religion invoking Jupiter, Mars, and Quirinus and the ordinary everyday religion of hearth and field, invoking figures like Janus, Vesta, Terminus, and the Lares; and the underlying concept of numen, which caused the Romans to view the natural world around them as being invested with animating spirits—extending not just to physical objects but to groups and actions.