

Notes on Quiz #3

History of Ancient Rome • Spring 2023

1. How did the Romans govern the territories over which they had direct rule?

The Romans set up territories they ruled over as “provinces” — literally, a job or responsibility for an ex-magistrate. A consul or praetor, after his year in office, would have his powers continued for another year for the purpose of accepting responsibility for governing a conquered territory. He was now a proconsul (or proprator), and was the sole Roman authority in the territory he’d been given. A large enough province might have a Roman legion stationed there, of which the proconsul or proprator was the commander.

Because there were only eight magistrates a year (two consuls and six praetors), and therefore only eight potential new governors, once there were more than eight provinces it became increasingly necessary to prorogue, or hold over, the sitting governors in their territories, with the result that some governors ended up ruling over their provinces for several years, allowing them to build up a power base there among the local nobles and their own legions. Thus the provincial governments allowed one man to have complete executive authority (rather than two as back at Rome), without a colleague or a senate or assembly to get in the way of his ambition; and many of them stayed in place for multiple years, rather than one year only as in Rome.

2. What were some of the ways conquest and expansion changed Rome?

Economically, large and small farmers as a whole benefited from the conquests. It was easier for the wealthy to establish large slave-worked estates, especially in central and southern Italy. Farmers began to produce commercially for Italy’s rapidly growing cities, which grew from the influx of wealth from Rome’s conquests and increased trade and commerce. The inflow of precious metals helped to create a stable monetary system, and the minting of millions of coins to pay soldiers helped to monetize the economy. Wealthy Romans increased their fortunes through war booty, overseas commerce, and lucrative public contracts.

Socially, imperial expansion benefited upper-class Romans, but created numerous discontented social groups. Many provincials resented their loss of independence and felt oppressed by often corrupt and rapacious Roman governors and tax collectors. Even Rome’s Italian allies came to feel abused. They did much of the fighting, but Rome kept most of victory’s fruits and treated them more like subjects.

Successful wars flooded Italy with slaves. While some skilled slaves came to work as household servants, tens of thousands ended up in far more dangerous and hostile conditions in mines, large workshops, and the fields of great estates. In the 140s and 130s, several dangerous slave revolts broke out, particularly in Italy and Sicily.

Meanwhile poorer citizens, especially the rural and urban plebs, faced desperate social and economic conditions by the late second century. Wealthy non-senators who made up the equestrian class resented the difficulties placed in the way of equites who sought to rise into the ranks of the consular nobility.

Culturally, the values and methods of foreign art and cultural expression, experienced by many in wars away from home and at home through immigration, the presence of foreign slaves, war booty, and burgeoning international commerce, created dissonance with the more reserved Roman culture. The process of adaptation to resolve this cultural conflict included the use of Greek artistic tools, including epic poetry, tragedy, comedy, history, and philosophy, to create art that emphasized the ideals and identity of Rome.

Politically, imperial expansion strained the Republic’s system of government. The rewards that came from holding high office and commanding conquering armies greatly increased, and this in turn raised political

competition among the leaders of noble or would-be-noble families in the senate to destructive levels. The expansion of the lower offices of the *cursus honorum* only intensified the competition for the two consulships at the top. Attempts to rein in ambitious individuals by legislating what had been traditional norms and by instituting punishments for those who violated them only produced greater efforts to evade them. At the same time, fear that someone might gain political advantage by sponsoring needed reforms prevented the senate from solving the problems that others could manipulate to their benefit. While Rome's empire grew, the competing oligarchs who controlled it became less and less able to solve the problems it created.

EC1. Romans who adapted Greek forms included all of the following EXCEPT:

(c) Scipio Aemilianus, who composed the tragic *Final Destruction of Carthage*

EC2. Who were the *publicani*? What role did they play in Roman imperialism?

One key element of Roman provincial government was tax farming. Because the governors had no supporting bureaucracy, tax collection was outsourced to for-profit corporations run by Roman middle class businessmen (*publicani*). These corporations gouged the populace by collecting as much money as they could, handing over to the Roman state the fixed amount the senate decreed for that province and pocketing the rest. This resulted in resentment, rebellion, and increased need for Roman military presence and oppression in the provinces.