

# REORDERING THE REPUBLIC

## THE STRUCTURE OF THE REPUBLIC

Working together, the **patricians** and **plebeians** created a practical and flexible unwritten constitution, or political structure. As part of their new Republican constitution, the Romans created new offices and institutions of government. Eventually, the government consisted of three parts:

(1) the **Senate**, a body of 300 members who advised elected officials, controlled public finances, and handled all foreign relations;

(2) various popular **assemblies**, in which all citizens voted on laws and elected officials;

(3) officials called **magistrates**, who put the laws into practice, governed in the name of the Senate and the people, and acted as priests.

Though initially dominated by patricians, all state offices, including the Senate, were later open to both patricians and plebeians.

When the last king of Rome was thrown out, his place was taken by two magistrates called **consuls**. Elected for one year, the consuls were both chief executives and commanders of the army.

Next to the consuls, the most important magistrates were the censors. Censors recorded the city's population and how much property each person owned. They also appointed new Senators when vacancies appeared. The ability to select new Senators gave the censors great influence in Roman society.

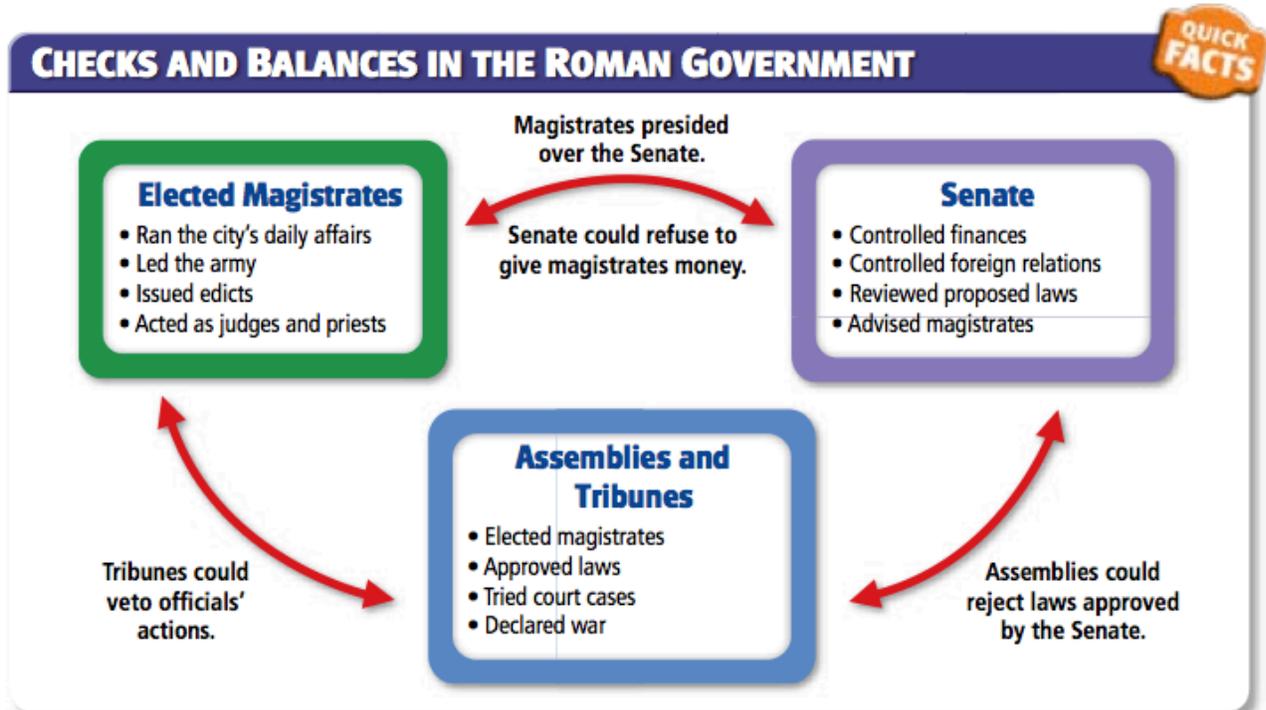
In the 300s BC Romans also began to elect magistrates called **praetors**. Primarily judges, praetors could also act for the consuls when the consuls were away at war. As Rome expanded, both consuls and praetors were usually given military commands or were appointed as provincial governors after finishing their terms of office. To assist the consuls and praetors, many other officials were also elected to handle various other aspects of the city's administration.

One reason that Rome's government worked well was that it included a system of **checks and balances**, in which each part of the government could impose certain constraints upon the others. For example, the Senate could do little without the consent of the consuls, but at the same time consuls could not enact major changes without funding from the Senate.

In the event of war, the senate might choose a **dictator**, or ruler who has complete control over a government. Each Roman dictator was granted power to rule for six months. After that time, he had to give up power.

Romans particularly admired **Cincinnatus** as a model dictator. Cincinnatus organized an army, led the Romans to victory over the attacking enemy, attended victory celebrations, and returned to his farmlands—all within 15 days.

(Source: "The Foundations of Rome," Susan Ramirez et al., *World History: Human Legacy*, Holt)



# SOCIAL DIVISION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

In the early days of the Republic, the heads of a few aristocratic families, known as **patricians**, elected officials from among themselves. Organized in clans, patrician families controlled every aspect of society—politics, religion, economics, and the military. Patricians maintained their power through a patronage system in which wealthy Romans provided financial, social, or legal support for lower ranking families in return for political backing and loyalty.

Almost from the beginning of the Republic, however, the common people, or **plebeians** (pli-bee-uhns), challenged the patricians for power. When invaders threatened Rome in 494 BC, the plebeians seceded, or withdrew. They left Rome and refused to fight until changes were made. Realizing that they would not have an army without the plebeians, the patricians grudgingly expanded plebeian rights. Once they received these new rights, the plebeians returned to defend the city. Back in Rome, they formed their own assembly, the Plebeian Council. That assembly had the responsibility of overseeing and protecting plebeian affairs.

To guarantee their rights, the plebeians also gained the right to elect officials known as **tribunes**. It was the tribunes' job to protect the plebeians against unjust treatment by patrician officials. Eventually, these tribunes even gained the right to **veto**, or ban, laws that seemed harmful or unjust to the plebeians.

Later, around 450 BC, the plebeians forced the patricians to have all laws written down. The laws were displayed in the Roman **Forum**, or central square, on 12 large bronze tablets. As a result, the code became known as the Law of the **Twelve Tables**. Because the laws were posted, patrician judges could not make decisions based on their own opinions or on secret laws. However, one of the newly posted laws was a ban on marriage between patricians and plebeians—an attempt by the patricians to preserve their special status.

(Source: "The Foundations of Rome," Susan Ramirez et al., *World History: Human Legacy*, Holt)

## THE TWELVE TABLES

**From Table I:** If anyone summons a man before the magistrate, he must go. If the man summoned does not go, let the one summoning him call the bystanders to witness and then take him by force.

**From Table III:** One who has confessed a debt, or against whom judgment has been pronounced, shall have thirty days to pay it in. After that forcible seizure of his person is allowed. The creditor shall bring him before the magistrate. Unless he pays the amount of the judgment or some one in the presence of the magistrate interferes in his behalf as protector the creditor so shall take him home and fasten him in stocks or fetters. He shall fasten him with not less than fifteen pounds of weight or, if he choose, with more. If the prisoner choose, he may furnish his own food. If he does not, the creditor must give him a pound of meal daily; if he choose he may give him more.

**From Table IV:** A dreadfully deformed child shall be quickly killed... If a father sells his son three times, the son shall be free from his father... A child born after ten months since the father's death will not be admitted into a legal inheritance.

**From Table VIII:** If one has injured a limb and does not compromise with the injured person, let there be retaliation. If one has broken a bone of a freeman with his hand or with a weapon, let him pay a penalty of three hundred coins. If he has broken the bone of a slave, let him have one hundred and fifty coins.

**From Table XI:** Marriages should not take place between plebeians and patricians.

